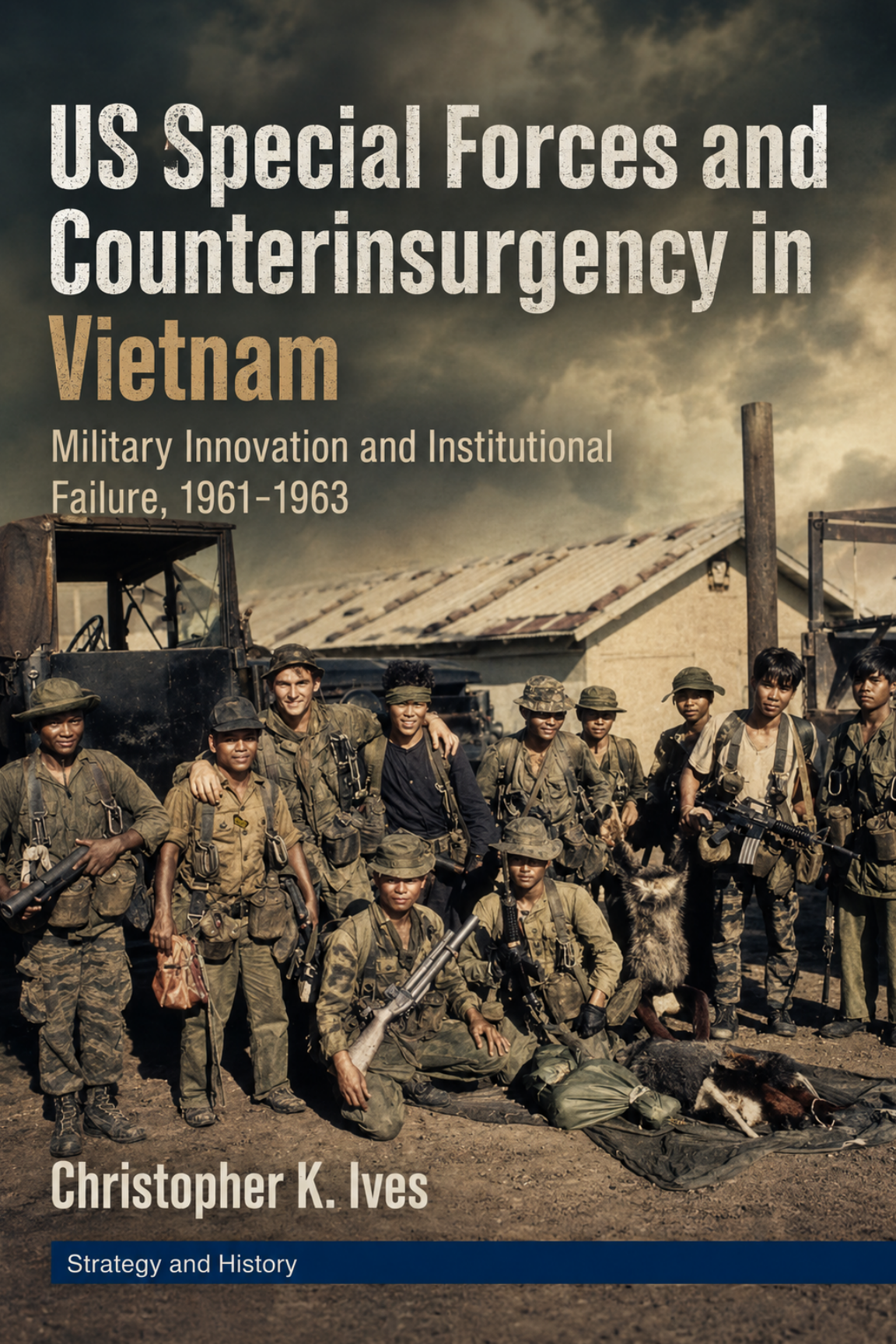
US Special Forces and Counterinsurgency in Vietnam

Military Innovation and Institutional Failure, 1961–1963



Christopher K. Ives

Strategy and History

US Special Forces and Counterinsurgency in Vietnam

This volume examines the efforts of US Army Special Forces to mobilize and train indigenous minorities in Vietnam.

Christopher K. Ives shows how, before the Second Indochina War, the Republic of Vietnam had begun to falter under the burden of an increasingly successful insurgency. The dominant American military culture could not conform to President Kennedy's guidance to wage 'small wars', while President Diem's provincial and military structures provided neither assistance nor security. The Green Berets developed and executed effective counterinsurgency tactics and operations with strategic implications while living, training, and finally fighting with the Montagnard peoples in the Central Highlands. Special Forces soldiers developed and executed what *needed* to be done to mobilize indigenous minorities, having assessed what *needed* to be known.

Combining Clausewitz, business theory and strategic insight, this book provides an important starting point for thinking about how the US military should be approaching the problems of today's 'small wars'.

This book will be of much interest to students of the Vietnam War, Special Forces operations, military innovation and strategic theory in general.

Christopher Ives holds a PhD in history from the Ohio State University, and is a veteran of the US Special Forces, with over 20 years' service. He now works as a security analyst.

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US Special Forces and Counterinsurgency in Vietnam

Military innovation and institutional failure, 1961–1963

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Series editor's preface

That famous New York philosopher Yogi Berra once remarked after a baseball game that: "it was *déjà vu* all over again." He was all too right. At present we sit in front of our televisions and watch the violence in Iraq spiral out of control, as American military forces get drawn deeper and deeper into the quagmire of the Middle East. Those of us who served in the American military in the 1960s and were "young" have seen history repeat itself (a reference to the account of the battles in the Ia Drang valley in November 1965; see Lieutenant General Harold Moore and Joe Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young*). We have watched an insurgency emerge from the ashes of a collapsed vicious, wretched regime and its inept military. At least in our youth we had a Secretary of Defense who could recognize an insurgency when he saw one, whatever his egregious failings in addressing the problems raised by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong.

Christopher Ives has addressed the initial, skillful efforts of the American Special Forces to address the security of the highlands of Vietnam and their Montagnard tribesmen. But what started off as a skillful and for the most part successful adaptation to the conditions of insurgency in the highlands then turned into a "strategic hamlet" program managed by officers and a bureaucracy–South Vietnamese as well as American–which proved unimaginative, incapable of adaptation to the real conditions of war, and irrelevant to the politics of the insurgency. Given the experiences of the American military in the two decades before Vietnam and the huge pressures of technological change in those decades, there was some small excuse for those failures.

Neverthless, as Clausewitz suggests, one needs to understand the kind of war in which one is going to embark. The American military writ large failed to understand the war in the south as it found itself slowly sinking into the Vietnam War. Driven by a Secretary of Defense who believed that technology and computing power had rendered history irrelevent to the problems at hand, the American military ignored the study of culture, history and languages in its desire to find the easy, simple silver bullet to

solve the knotty and all too messy problems raised by the conflict against the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong.

This tale of American failure then is a cautionary tale all too relevent to the problems of the twenty-first century. When the war in Iraq is over, the American military will not have the luxury of turning to the preparation for war against a conventional opponent – i.e. the Soviet Union – but rather will confront further interventions in places like South Vietnam, Somalia, and Iraq – places where history and culture reverberate. And as that great American warrior, Jim Mattis, has pointed out on a number of occasions, one can prepare for future war by studying history, or one can learn on the battlefield by filling body bags.

Professor Williamson Murray, Series Co-Editor
Fairfax, Virginia, August 2006

Preface

Professor Mark Grimsley's advice to pick a thesis and dissertation topic you loved because you'd have to live with it for a long time rang in my ears. I did that. *US Special Forces* began as a paper in an American history seminar. My own time in Special Forces began in 1982, during the nadir of the organization, as the army focused on the air–land battle to drown out echoes of withdrawal and defeat in Vietnam. Curiously the multiple-tour veterans of Southeast Asia who broke me in during that first assignment with the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) emphasized what young captains like myself – often addressed as "di-uy", Vietnamese for captain – needed to *learn*.

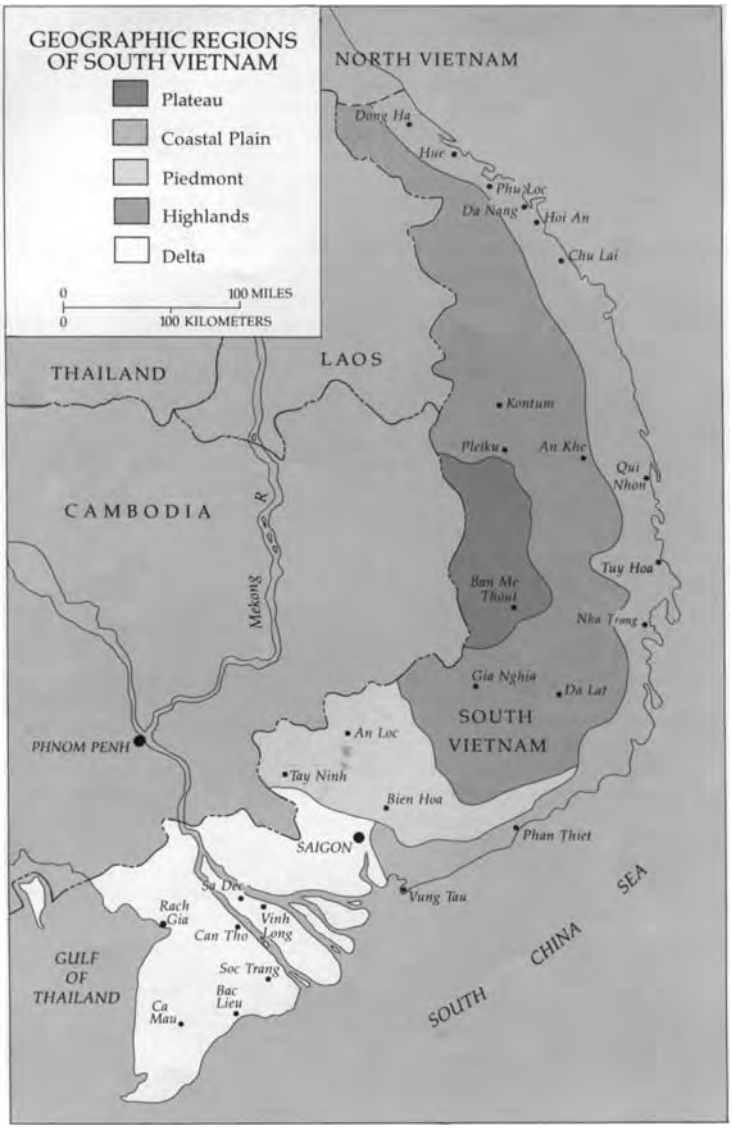
Every action or event on the training schedule presented an opportunity for professional education or training, or both, from these long-serving professionals. Something as mundane as a road march to the local training area became the forum for different techniques for track security or mechanical ambushes. Mike Leachman, Doug Anderson, Duke Snider, Pete Holmstock, John Riley, Jay Graves, Serafin Telles, Ed Blakemore, Joe Johnson, and others took every opportunity to make sure that none of the younger, less experienced soldiers they served with might miss the chance to learn a technique – a tactical best practice – or experiment in training if it might save a life or complete a mission before the target window closed. This attention to detail and obsession with realistically training hard and wringing every lesson before deployment came through in subsequent special operations force assignments including duty with the 7th Special Forces Group as well, then the 12th in the US Army Reserve (since inactivated at an excruciating cost in human capital). The officers I served under – then-Colonel Dick Potter, Colonel Hugh Scruggs, and others – were astonishingly patient with my experiments and the latitude I gave my men to find the best solution.

Acknowledgments

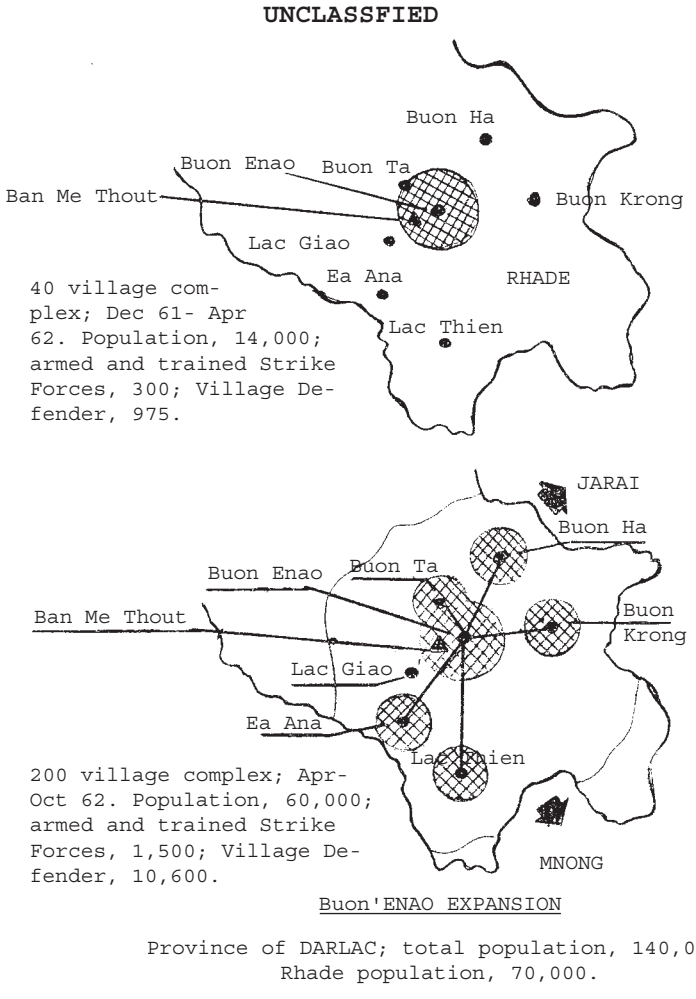
I must address my intellectual debts to Williamson Murray and Leslie Smith, not only insightful, far-seeing historians but also rigorous masters of writing in clear, succinct language. Allan R. Millett, Warren Van Tine, and Joe Guilmartin provided candid advice, clear guidance, and high academic standards.

The publishers have demonstrated patience during the production process for which I am grateful. Responsibility for mistakes is mine.

My lovely wife, Kristin, maintained astonishing good humor and patience throughout the ordeal of graduate school and the additional efforts at bridging the gap between a dissertation and a book manuscript. Our son, James, provided a fresh, daily reminder why the study of men in war requires serious, ongoing study for him, the republic, and for our species. To paraphrase Trotsky, we may not be interested in war but war is interested in us.

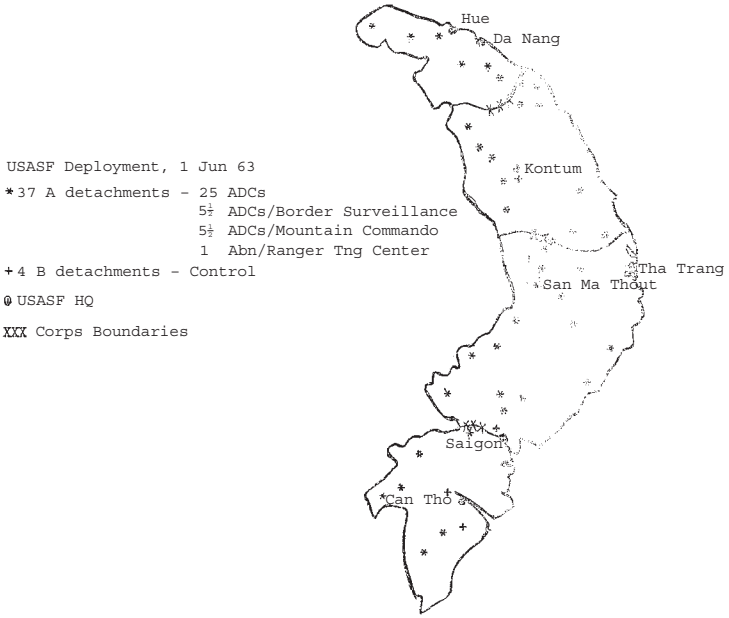


Map 1 Vietnam Regional Map [from Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years*, 1965–1973 (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1988), 9].



Map 2 Village Defense Program, Buon Enao Expansion [“Annex B to 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces Outline History,” USASOC Archives, Vietnam collection, 4].

Map 3 Provinces and Administrative Divisions, 1963 [Lieutenant General John J. Tolson, *Airmobility 1961–1971* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1973), 60].



Map 4 Civilian Irregular Defense Group Program locations, June 1963 [“Outline History of the 5th SF Gp (ABN) Participation in the CIDG Program 1961–1970,” National Archives College Park, Maryland, Record Group 319, Records of the Army Staff, 12].

Abbreviations

ADC	Area Development Center
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
CA	Civil Affairs
CAS	Close Air Support
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
CIP	Counter Insurgency Plan
CSD	Combined Studies Division
CTZ	Corps Tactical Zone
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
GVN	Government of Vietnam
LLDB	Vietnamese Special Forces
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MAP	Military Assistance Program
NCO	Non-commissioned officer
NLF	National Liberation Front
ODA/B/C	Operational Detachment A/B/C (corresponding to team/company/battalion)
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PSYOP	Psychological operations
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SFOB	Special Forces Operating Base
USASFV	United States Army Special Forces Vietnam
VC	Viet Cong

Introduction

> It is not hard for firmly united, clever, and courageous men to do great things in the world. Ten such men affect 100,000.
>
> Jacob Burkhardt

Soldiers, politicians, and diplomats in Saigon and Washington struggled with concepts and plans for counterinsurgency strategy and operations in the fall of 1961. As this struggle of ideas and bureaucratic politics occurred, a single Special Forces medic took his aid bag into the Central Highlands. This mission began what would become the only successful counterinsurgency program in the midst of the insurgent victories in South Vietnam. This Special Forces medic, Sergeant First Class Paul Campbell, helped launch a pilot program in November 1961 that would grow by 1963 to reach and mobilize many of the minority groups in the culturally and ethnically diverse South. The efforts of this pilot program quickly stabilized a significant, threatened part of South Vietnam's highlands. Organized and trained to lead anti-communist, guerrilla forces, US Army Special Forces soldiers quickly adapted their operational techniques. These unique soldiers experimented with organizational and operational structures to mobilize indigenous, mountain-based communities, the Montagnards. This inquiry examines the nature of changes in operational practices designed by US Army Special Forces in Vietnam at the beginning of the Second Indochina War.

The Republic of Vietnam that was the destination for ultimately thousands of American soldiers in the early 1960s was a turbulent place. War loomed on the horizon again for Indochina, a handful of years after the Viet Minh victory over the French in 1954. The Second Indochina War grew out of unresolved issues in Vietnam, north and south of the 17th parallel. Above that geographical line, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam embarked upon the creation of a workers' and peasants' paradise based on the organization, discipline, and force of the Viet Minh. To the south' in what had been Cochin China and including the former protectorate in the Central Highlands, the Republic of Vietnam attempted to create a democracy of sorts on the crumbling foundations of a moribund colonial

administration. America, despite its scant interest in the reestablishment of colonial domination, had supported French efforts in the First Indochina War. Vietnam, north and south, had already attracted the attention and assistance of the Cold War's antagonists (see Map 1).

The operations of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) mirrored those of the US Army, encouraged by its American advisors. Republic of Vietnam village-based security initiatives, borrowed from earlier *agroville* practices that combined population concentration and rural development as well as British measures used in Malaya, did not prevent insurgent successes. Seeking innovation, the government of South Vietnam and by then the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV)' tried to spread the successful adaptations of American Special Forces at the operational and strategic levels. These efforts generally failed, having been misapplied across the country.

Concepts and structure

Concepts

US Army Special Forces soldiers adapted to battlefield conditions based in the hamlets and villages. Fighting featured short, sharp contests with insurgents often hardened by almost a decade of conflict with the French. Guerrilla foot mobility and stealth had matched French firepower and maneuver. This same combination of fieldcraft often frustrated the ARVN as well. Adaptations accumulated from experimentation by Special Forces soldiers grew into genuine innovation based on who they were, what they knew, and what they could make work. *US Special Forces* is a critical analysis of Special Forces operations in Vietnam during the period 1961–3, offering that these soldiers demonstrated *cognitive dominance*. This dominance bridged practice and operational requirements with a multidisciplinary martial culture that embraced aggressiveness as well as mental agility. Sensitivity to local conditions as well as the larger contexts of the Montagnards and South Vietnam's security issues enabled more little victories than defeats by Special Forces in the mobilization of isolated highlander communities.

Successful, directed change involves letting go of techniques, principles, or technologies that do not satisfy operational requirements. Cognitive dominance is the adaptation that can take place to fill the inevitable voids between doctrine, past experience, and the grim, new realities of conflict. Achieving cognitive dominance is a challenge common in history to soldiers and leaders. "Statesman and soldier," Peter Paret asserts in his introduction to Clausewitz's *On War*, "must shed tradition, convenience, any influence that interferes with their achieving the major objective."[1]

US Army Special Forces soldiers managed change amid a complex set of contexts, agents, and actions. These capable soldiers, given wide freedom

WHAT MUST BE DONE > WHAT MUST BE KNOWN > WHAT IS KNOWN > WHAT CAN BE DONE

Figure 0.1 Knowledge and strategy.

of action, drove adaptations at the tactical and operational levels. Special Forces adaptations collectively constituted a counterinsurgency program option sought by the US in response to the challenges of the small, hot conflicts of the Cold War. There was innovation sought but not understood or successfully applied on a larger scale in this transition between the two, "big" Indochina Wars.

Clausewitz might have observed about this paradox of operational innovation and institutional failure, that

> theory will have fulfilled its main task when it is used to analyze the constituent elements of war, to distinguish precisely what at first sight seems fused to explain in full the properties of the means employed and to show their probable effects, to define clearly the nature of the ends in view, and to illuminate all phases of warfare in a through critical inquiry.

Working theories are the foundation of such inquiries.[2] *US Special Forces* links this working theory notion to Special Forces cognitive dominance.

The reconstruction of events and analysis in *US Special Forces* reveals an interrelationship between strategy – relating means to ends – and knowledge – data and purpose-formed information that enables action. Special Forces soldiers developed and executed what *needed* to be done to mobilize indigenous minorities, having assessed what *needed* to be known. Soldiers and operational detachments possessed individual and organizational knowledge gained in rigorous training and experimentation that enabled action. The synthesis that emerged required a balance among cultural, political, military and other elements. This linked strategy and knowledge. Knowledge enabled strategy (see Figure 0.1).[3]

Structure

The introduction establishes strategic contexts for exploring subsequent decisions and events. French efforts to reassert control over what had become Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam proved unsuccessful despite eight years of conflict and American aid. Annealed by decades of clandestine experiences at home and abroad, the Viet Minh emerged from the period of Japanese occupation to defeat the French. The Viet Minh combined organizational zeal, hard-won experience, a united front appeal (which proved false, ultimately twice), and fervent nationalism. The 1954 Geneva Accords, though, while ending the war and sending the French west, established two Vietnams: the Democratic Republic of Vietnam north of

the 17th parallel, with the Viet Minh in charge, and a Republic of Vietnam in the south, soon ruled by a genuine nationalist, Ngo Dinh Diem, who returned from exile in the United States. Tens of thousands of refugees moved north and south as the new countries struggled to establish administrations and govern. The accords called for elections. America quickly stepped in to recognize the non-communist South Vietnam even as the French organized to withdraw. Diem became president when the Emperor Bao Dai left, a status confirmed by less-than-honest elections. The new president also survived significant challenges to order from organized crime and armed religious sects. Diem emerged strengthened and in charge. The North bided its time, almost consumed by the violence required to collectivize above the 17th parallel. As Diem struggled to modernize, forge a government, fend off challenges, and resettle refugees, American assistance grew along with armed resistance to non-communist rule. In 1961 the new American president sent his personal military advisor General Maxwell D. Taylor to assess both Diem's and South Vietnam's prospects for survival.

Chapter One examines the Special Forces deployment into the Central Highlands from November 1961 through December 1962. What began as an assessment of resistance potential by a combat medic quickly grew into an experimental, village defense project among the Rhade Montagnard communities in Buon Enao, Darlac province. This project's experimental outcomes became the basis for the Village Defense Program across Darlac province. What were the factors that shaped the outcomes of what became known as the Buon Enao experiment? Chapter Two looks at the background and characteristics of the principals on the ground in South Vietnam: US Army Special Forces soldiers and the primary indigenous communities affected by their efforts, the Montagnards or highlanders. How did the respective cultural characteristics help shape events? Did historical continuities exist that would affect contemporary events?

Chapter Three examines the doctrinal context of the US Army in the 1950s that shaped the American understanding. What was this context and how would it help the South Vietnamese organize, train, and resist the insurgency? Throughout much of its history, the US Army dealt with small wars with a mix of organized violence and nation building in far-off places, from America's frontiers to the Caribbean and Asia. The twentieth century's two world wars followed an intense period of professional and organizational turmoil. Projecting decisive power across the world represented a significant break with the US Army's past. As the Korean War had so recently demonstrated, small wars on the periphery of national interest were still very much a part of the army's potential challenges.

The armistice in Korea preceded the negotiated settlement in Geneva that ended the First Indochina War by only a handful of months. Shortly after Vietnam's partition, an American national security policy that required a "New Look" soon threw the US Army into professional and organizational turmoil for the balance of this period between two Indochina

wars. Struggles between senior army leaders – beginning with the chief of staff, General Matthew Ridgway – and the Department of Defense and White House over how best to organize, arm, and equip the army resulted in doctrinal and organizational turmoil. This turmoil helped to obscure operational and strategic challenges that faced the US Army as it took on the mission to advise the fledgling army of the Republic of Vietnam. The American army *knew* conventional operations that featured combined arms in the application of overwhelming firepower and maneuver to defeat enemy forces. Doctrine reflected this knowledge as did culture, equipment, and training. What organizations know determines what they can do. What shaped the US Army doctrine of the period? How did doctrine and these other factors meet the challenges of the small war in Southeast Asia?

Chapter Four looks at various contexts and the discourse about security challenges and responses in Vietnam in 1961. Vietnam was only one of several security challenges facing the new Kennedy administration. South Vietnam's problems competed with crises presented by Cuba, Berlin, and Laos, all in the broader context of the Cold War. Revolutionary guerrilla warfare – as practiced by the fledgling National Liberation Front – provided a unique security challenge for the new Republic of Vietnam and its American sponsors. Developing methods for dealing with the combined, simultaneous threat of political and military action was the principal task facing Special Forces soldiers, Saigon bureaucrats, as well as American advisors and diplomats in 1961.

The small war in 1961 presented particular circumstances and challenges, with the initiative going to the side that best came to grips. Later years would present different conditions and images of war colored and outlined by these initial conditions. There was quite a dialogue among and between participants in Saigon and Washington about responses to the security dilemma faced by South Vietnam. The Viet Minh reborn as the Viet Cong and ultimately the National Liberation Front organized and prosletyzed in many parts of the south, drawing on increasing amounts of assistance of the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam, just across the 17th parallel. Generals and politicians, bureaucrats and statesmen developed and debated courses of action for dealing with the insurgency. What were the principal threads in this fabric of counterinsurgency?

Chapter Five begins with a tactical and operational account of 1963 as the successes of the Village Defense Program spread across Vietnam's Central Highlands as well as other parts of South Vietnam. The account examines the expansion of operations as the village defense experiment became a template for a country-wide paramilitary program, the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) program. Control of this program also shifted from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). The CIDG program demonstrated that a counterinsurgency solution was possible to oppose the people's war, at least at the operational level by 1963.

Village-based, rice-roots self-defense augmented with military civic action and psychological warfare locked out insurgent efforts among most Montagnard communities in South Vietnam when led and managed by US Army Special Forces. At the strategic level, however, American and South Vietnamese efforts to understand and expand CIDG achievements were unsuccessful. The operation to move control of the CIDG program from CIA to MACV control, Switchback, obscured the critical differences that separated success from failure. Did the expansion of the CIDG affect its efficacy? What were the consequences of the shift of control over the CIDG program from the CIA to MACV? What techniques worked and what were the principles of this emerging counterinsurgency effort?

Chapter Six looks at the Strategic Hamlet Program and the larger American advisory effort. These initiatives both consumed more resources and garnered more attention than the CIDG program. Elements of complexity – nonlinearity over time, sensitivity to initial conditions, and the variability of dynamic inputs – were present throughout the conflicts in Vietnam. These elements made difficult the task of getting at the ground truth. Inability to appreciate that critical elements of Vietnamese history and society were obscure to American sensibilities complicated adaptation. South Vietnamese administrative, political, and social structures as well as their military organizations could not support or sustain honest, local programs, especially among ethnic or religious minorities. American assumptions and understanding of village-based programs would suffer from dishonest reporting and inappropriate measures of effectiveness. Nowhere were such misunderstandings or poor metrics more damaging than with regard to assessing the Strategic Hamlet Program and the almost decade-long advisory effort assisting the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. What was the return on investment for these mainstream efforts with regard to battling the insurgency?

The innovations of Special Forces soldiers are the focal point of Chapter Seven. Predilections inculcated by training, experience, and doctrine obscured what was really the ground truth. Tacit knowledge elements – those of practice and learn-on-the-fly – versus explicit elements bounded by doctrine – those of process and by-the-book – did not appear different or new. There would be the almost inevitable lag in capturing appropriate techniques that lurked between what worked before and what worked now. The Appendix, "Constituent elements of knowledge," examines supporting concepts in greater depth.

Adaptation of accepted combat practices was slow. How the combatants came to recognize what they knew and make decisions about how and what to do stumbled and often fell on the tangle foot obstacles of cultural distinctions and ignorance. Concerns of military culture influenced what doctrine made explicit, or not. Assessment required matching objectives with results gathered with the least ambiguous measurements. What enabled Special Forces soldiers to adapt rapidly to the challenges of mobilizing

isolated, indigenous populations? Why did these tactical and operational successes not translate into success at the strategic level in widespread innovation to meet the insurgent threat?

"So what?"

The struggles of military organizations and institutions to adapt, innovate, and learn mirror those of other social organizations, but with serious, lasting consequences. Sir Michael Howard wrote, that:

> The past is a foreign country; there is very little we can say about it until we have learned its language and understood its assumptions; and in deriving conclusions about the processes which occurred in it and applying them to our own day we must be very careful indeed.[4]

There are no lessons in this study. Each historical event is unique, shaped by its context and characters as well as contingency. This account integrates new primary sources and the language of the period from the tactical level originating in Vietnam's hamlets and villages to the strategic and policy levels of Saigon and Washington. *US Special Forces* scrupulously tries to create order out of the files and memoranda, records, and reports. Howard also cautioned that

> the differences brought about between one war and another by social or technological changes are immense, and an unintelligent study of military history which does not take adequate account of these changes may quite easily be more dangerous than no study at all.[5]

The language and records of the men and organizations in this account and analysis deal with continuities and discontinuities. These continuities and discontinuities grew not only out of Vietnam's centuries of conflict, but also out of the American institutions and organizations applied to aiding the South's nascent, struggling democracy. Clausewitzian elements shape the battlefield before the first troop ship fills and sails. Structural elements identified in *On War*, such as war's inherent friction and the dynamism of history, are an appropriate point of departure. The events, large and small, that filled the decades of war that raged across Vietnam would not prove to be so very different from the First Indochina War through the interregnum to the end of Second Indochina War.

Vietnam: the setting and insurgency

Stopping short of direct intervention to save the French from defeat in 1954, the United States had shifted support to what became the Republic of Vietnam and its new president, Ngo Dinh Diem. Advisors – civilian and

military – and assistance flowed into the country as refugees went north and south. These refugees sought different kinds of peace and freedom after more than fifteen years of resistance and war. War and resistance soon came again in the south as Diem's regime resettled tens of thousands of new residents, many to the remote highlands.

The South's new government struggled with development and modernization in an overwhelmingly rural area. Political efforts to create stability gave way to violence against powerful criminal elements and religious sects. Other minorities found their traditional way of life threatened by this maelstrom of movement and change. Communist and nationalist forces represented by the former Viet Minh, north and south, resumed organization and resistance activities ingrained by the decades-long struggle against the French and Japanese. Despite the Saigon government's attempts at land and political reform, war came again. "The leaders of North Vietnam in their wars against French and Americans," historian MacGregor Knox found, "drew inspiration from the French Revolution (and its Bolshevik and Maoist progeny) as well as from Vietnamese nationalism."[6] The security situation in South Vietnam worsened in 1960 before President Kennedy took office and belied more than five years of bureaucratic and military advice with assistance aimed at developing civil administration and infrastructure – local security as well as the development of a national army.

The setting

The Geneva Accords of 1954 ended the First Indochina War. French colonial administration and military forces withdrew over the next several years, leaving Vietnam partitioned along the 17th parallel. In the DRV, Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Party worked rapidly to collectivize agriculture and nationalize industries.[7] Military forces and many auxiliaries became the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN). Many tens of thousands of unsympathetic Vietnamese, often Catholics and other supporters of the colonial regime, fled south as refugees. In the south, Ngo Dinh Diem, named as the premier, succeeded and unseated Emperor Bao Dai in 1955. Although it was confirmed by referendum, religious sects and well-organized and well-equipped criminal bands challenged Diem's hold on power. Although a nationalist, the Catholic Diem's legitimacy suffered from his association with the colonial administration's legacy of French domination that allowed no Vietnamese officials in the middle or upper echelons of authority.[8] Complex problems faced the new regime.

Vast numbers of people were on the move. Some 50,000 Viet Minh troops and another 20,000 sympathizers went north, but left behind cadres (numbering perhaps 10,000 operatives) and caches of arms. South Vietnam accommodated almost 900,000 refugees (many of them Catholic) from the north. The country south of the 17th parallel was overwhelmingly rural.

It produced rice and rubber for export. Much of the new country's ethnically diverse population supported itself with family-based farming, using traditional methods. This agricultural base centered on the village – and its hamlet subdivisions – for cultural and social structures as well.[9]

A mandarin president

Supported by the United States, Diem reduced the challenge of the armed sects and Buddhist dissidents.[10] The deadline for elections set by the Geneva Accords came and went amid this turmoil. With firm American support, Diem remained in power. He set about remaking South Vietnam as an authoritarian society in a different manner from its socialist neighbor to the north.[11]

The Diem regime's central tenets were family centralism and personalism. Centralism influenced the government's structure and function, focusing authority and decision making in Saigon. Personalism – largely engineered by the president's brother – attempted to provide an organizing, nationalist ideology for this regime to counter that of the Communist Party in the DRV.

Centralism grew out of the mandarin family history of Diem. Fervent Catholics, this family enjoyed influence and high social position for over 100 years in French Indochina. The Diem family also suffered under Buddhist persecution.[12] A reliance on family relationships would bring his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, and his wife, Madame Nhu, and others into key positions throughout the tenure of the regime. Personalism was an instant ideology that blended collectivist, Christian, and statist strains from the Diem family's French intellectual past.[13]

Personalism took organized political shape in the Can Lao. With as many elements of an intelligence operation as of a political party, Can Lao exercised shadowy influence over many civilian and military appointments.[14] In diplomatic correspondence American ambassador Elbridge Durbrow characterized it as "a nationalist philosophy which will offer a positive answer to Communism."[15] Ngo Dinh Nhu, President Diem's brother, formed this secretive movement-cum-organization in 1950. By 1954 Can Lao had enough influence to play a role in Diem's return to Vietnam to take power from Emperor Bao Dai. There were about 16,000 members by mid-1959 and Ambassador Durbrow observed that "five out of fifteen Cabinet members and 71 out of 123 National Assembly men are known to be Can Lao members."[16]

Ambassador Durbrow compared the Can Lao to the Kuomintang because of its centralized organization and domination by individuals that shared a web of family, business, and regional relationships. It was a poor ideological foundation for Diem's urban and rural programs. Diem abolished traditional, local elections for municipal councils in 1956, appointing in their stead loyal functionaries to serve under province-level chiefs. Personalism,

observed the American ambassador, offered little to the average Vietnamese worker or peasant.[17] This added discontent to that which existed in the aftermath of the sect repression, and was coupled with concerns of favoritism for Can Lao members and fear of its officials.[18]

The new country

South Vietnam was overwhelmingly a rural country. Rural programs aimed at no less than the total reorganization of peasant society. Population and refugee resettlement plans attempted to consolidate control by the regime. Between 1957 and 1961 some 210,000 peasants and refugees moved or were relocated into government-mandated areas and villages in provinces around Saigon and those in the Central Highlands.[19] Although South Vietnam had a total population of perhaps 16 million, these relocations created a web of tension in the targeted areas of the countryside where the moves were concentrated.[20] One program settled many peasants into collective-style farms, *agrovilles*, at the behest of the regime. Peasants found traditional ties to communal lands and burial ground disrupted and village elections abolished, with village chiefs and councils replaced with government appointees.[21] The government seized many communal lands under the guise of land reform. The land was consolidated and sold, and control shifted to absentee landlords. "Coercion," wrote Ambassador Durbrow, "rather than suasion are [sic] often used by these [Government of Vietnam] officials in carrying out the programs decided upon in Saigon."[22]

Ethnic and religious minorities made up about 2 million of South Vietnam's population. In the Central Highlands, new population pressures pushed Montagnard tribes from traditional areas, exacerbating long-standing problems. These highland peoples – perhaps numbering 900,000 – were of different ethnic and cultural stock from the Vietnamese. Montagnards enjoyed a different though paternalistic relationship with the French colonial administration. This prior relationship had largely kept Vietnamese influence out of the remote Central Highlands. Tensions that arose from an in-migration of Vietnamese would make the Montagnards resentful of the lowland regime's efforts. This resentment created a well of discontent from which both ethnic nationalists and eventually insurgents would draw.[23]

Amid these changes, Diem placed trusted military officers into provincial administration. Security concerns, rural and urban, spawned an anti-communist crusade.[24] Political discontent with Diem's changes and policies fueled a growing peasant-based insurgency. When he left Vietnam for the United States in December 1956, then-Colonel Edward Lansdale – who had closely advised President Diem and enjoyed his confidence – concluded that "the people of a country are the main feature on a battleground of communist choosing since the ensuing struggle becomes between the communists and the government over which side will have the allegiance of the

people."[25] The regime promised much to the farmers and delivered very little. "Diem," wrote Bernard Fall, "created the movement of discontent in South Viet-Nam. North Viet-Nam and the Viet Cong fed on it."[26] A principally indigenous insurgency developed in the countryside, nourished by peasant discontent. After a period of quiet organization, communist cadres or *can-bo* began a campaign to de-legitimize the Saigon regime and "My-Diem," the American Diem.[27]

The Democratic Republic of Vietnam had rushed down the road to collectivization and party control. The Central Committee gave the People's Army two missions after a study conducted for the 12th plenary session, in Hanoi, in March 1957. The People's Army of Vietnam had twin missions, to protect socialism in the republic and to "implement national unification and complete the achievement of independence and democracy throughout the country." By 1959 former Viet Minh cadres in the south – accepting at first a trickle of returning southerners from the north – established numerous base areas and 139 self-defense "platoons" in South Vietnam with another 34 in the Central Highlands.[28]

American military assistance and limited advice in Southeast Asia had flowed to the French during their attempts to battle the Viet Minh. To maintain the vast array of equipment and facilitate French withdrawal after the Geneva Accords in 1954, American soldiers went to South Vietnam. American advisors began to shape the newly formed Army of the Republic of Vietnam in a less-mechanized version of the US Army – supervised by the Military Assistance Advisory Group – equipped and organized in conventional formations. Doctrine insisted on maneuver and decisive battle. Training reinforced doctrine and, with an eye to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north, the ARVN sought battle with the nascent military bands of the insurgents. Insurgents most often refused attritional combats with the army, preferring instead to reinforce the political actions and organizational efforts in the hamlets and villages.

Assessment and assistance

Destabilization of Laos, after several years of American assistance and training, darkened the bright beginnings of President Kennedy's new administration. One of the "best and brightest" analysts brought to the White House was Walter W. Rostow, as Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs. Another analyst, who eventually reached ambassadorial rank, was Robert W. Komer, who occupied a position on the National Security Council. Komer sent a memorandum to Rostow in April 1961, commenting on recent reports from South Vietnam. Considerable tension existed between Ambassador Durbrow, the Military Assistance Advisory Group, and President Diem. Durbrow wanted Diem to broaden his base of domestic political power. American advisors, restricted to brigade and above assignments, continued to inculcate the fledgling South Vietnamese

army with American doctrines that blended firepower and maneuver; they were not responsible for internal security. Diem played the ambassador against senior military advisors, wary not only of obligations (as yet unstated) that accompanied American assistance, but also of his own army, growing resistance from the insurgency, and a hostile North Vietnam. "[T]here is far more emphasis on what we ought to do," wrote Komer to Rostow, "than on the really gut questions – how to do so . . .." What could provide leverage to persuade Diem? Military assistance very much outstripped other aid and Komer questioned "whether task force directorship [of the US mission] should be in Defense rather than State, although I grant that the instrumentalities to be employed are largely military."[29]

Archived diplomatic message traffic and other correspondence throughout the balance of 1961 establishes a trend to privilege military advice and assistance, inexorably putting a uniformed face and perspective on decision making and subsequent actions.[30] General Taylor made a two-week visit to South Vietnam in late October 1961 for the purposes of assessment, as well as to lend credibility to plans soon to be put in motion to increase and change the vector of assistance. Taylor reported to President Kennedy that the insurgency-threatened South Vietnam might endanger the region. Taylor offered:

> Aside from the morale factor, the Vietnamese Government is caught in interlocking circles of bad tactics and bad administrative arrangements which pin their forces on the defensive in ways which permit a relatively small Viet-Cong force (about one-tenth the size of the GVN regulars) to create conditions of frustration and terror certain to lead to a political crisis, if a positive turning point is not soon achieved.[31]

Taylor identified the catalyst for creating this turning point, namely ramped-up multilateral advisory help and American forces as a vanguard of larger deployments if required. In two weeks Roger Hilsman, Director of Intelligence and Research at the Department of State, disagreed with Taylor's recommendations to the president, putting his disagreement in writing to the Secretary of State. Hilsman had prepared a detailed report and plan offering a very different alternative for enhancing aid to South Vietnam, but it was not ready for publication.

Taylor's recommendations had reverberated through the national security elements at the top of the Kennedy administration. Rather than favoring the lever of American military assistance, Hilsman's study found that

> the most effective way of meeting a guerrilla threat like that of the Viet Cong is not with regular troops, but rather by a sophisticated combination of civic action, intelligence, police work, and constabulary-like counter-guerrilla forces that use a tactical doctrine quite different from the traditional doctrine of regular forces.

Local forces, their legitimacy enhanced through targeted military civic action, needed to play the central role in establishing security. "Radical innovation," Hilsman went on to argue, had to come about, "in the organization, doctrine, equipment and tactical deployment of counter-guerrilla forces," and that this was "a primary requirement in Vietnam."[32] This discord would play out in South Vietnam, in the contested Central Highlands, proving the latter position right and the former position wrong but possessing too much cultural and institutional momentum to stop.

President Diem pressured his American advisors and supporters for a very different sort of help than he had received. Millions of dollars in aid, combined with the collective help of hundreds of military and civilian advisors, had not made South Vietnam secure. Help came instead from a US Army officer on loan to the CIA in Saigon. This man, Colonel Gilbert Layton, sent one man. That man was a US Army Special Forces sergeant on loan from the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) on Okinawa to teach combat medical skills to South Vietnamese intelligence agents. Sergeant First Class Paul Campbell drove a MAAG jeep into the Central Highlands to see what might be done.

American Special Forces soldiers found themselves committed to this mare's nest in advisory roles. Entire operational detachments arrived from Okinawa or Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to establish training centers or to train elite units, like Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) rangers. These detachments by 1961 found themselves loaned out for other training missions once they arrived in Vietnam. One such mission involved Sergeant First Class Paul Campbell's trip to the Central Highlands to assess the potential for mobilizing the dominant Montagnard minority tribe, the Rhade, for self-defense of their hamlets and villages. The insurgency that had simmered since President Diem's repression of political dissent and active pursuit of opposition groups such as former Viet Minh activists came to a boil. South Vietnamese efforts to establish local security had failed. American advisory efforts with the ARVN had focused on creating an army to repel an invasion by North Vietnam, not to deal with an insurgency at the rice-roots level.

1 Crossbows to carbines

President Kennedy and his administration had decided that a counterinsurgency strategy provided the best chance of supporting the embattled government of South Vietnam in 1961. Several events influenced the President and a handful of advisors to direct the adoption of a strategy that they hoped would combine civic and humanitarian action with political and military efforts. Counterinsurgency concepts and operations were poorly understood. But the anonymously referenced "playing Batman in the boondocks" was often a topic of discussions in Saigon and Washington. One day in early November 1961 the substance of what became known as counterinsurgency came down to one US Army Special Forces medical sergeant, in civilian clothes, driving a jeep into the Central Highlands to see if he could help some of the indigenous highlanders, the Montagnards. US Army Special Forces soldiers were the catalyst for a Counterinsurgency experiment in South Vietnam's sugged Central Highlands.

Kennedy formed the Special Group (Counterinsurgency) as a National Security Council committee on January 18 1962. National Security Action Memorandum No. 124 established Special Group (Counterinsurgency) "to assure unity of effort and the use of all available resources with maximum effectiveness in preventing and resisting subversive insurgency and related forms of indirect aggression in friendly countries." Members of the Special Group included the president's military representative, the Attorney General, the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of the CIA, the President's National Security Advisor, the Administrator of the Agency for International Development, and the Director of the US Information Agency. The president also directed Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara to look into the matter. President Kennedy had publicly spoken on the need for counterinsurgency capabilities and wanted defense and other agencies to "examine means for placing more emphasis on the development of counter-guerrilla forces."[1]

The executive decision came in the wake of international security pressures felt by the new President and his fledgling administration. One influence was the furor, inside the government and from public opinion,

over the spectacularly unsuccessful Bay of Pigs operation directed at Cuba and Castro.[2] Another influence was the Soviet Union's declaration of an open venue of conflict through "wars of national liberation." General Taylor, President Kennedy's military advisor, had called for a new strategic doctrine of flexible response. In his 1960 book *The Uncertain Trumpet*, Taylor advocated a range of military capabilities to deal with security challenges short of general war, citing contemporary Cold War confrontations in Laos and Berlin.[3] The unraveling of the uneasy peace in Laos and its subsequent neutralization – where a mixed American advisory effort from the military and Central Intelligence Agency had supplanted the French – brought about another potential lever on American behavior. Taken together, these pressures buttressed the Kennedy administration's position to support the Diem regime in South Vietnam for both domestic and international policy reasons. The ground truth in South Vietnam also forced the requirements for a counterinsurgency strategy on Americans aiding the increasingly embattled government.

Distrust and enmity generally characterized the relationship between these sturdy mountain peoples and the Vietnamese. Diem regime policies that resettled Vietnamese into the Central Highlands created tension as provincial administrators abrogated some traditional rights of the highlanders. The American-led pilot program in self-defense became the Village Defense Program. What were the tactical and operational variables involved in mobilizing these minorities? How did the variables of this experiment interact? How did the experiment grow to include other paramilitary activity? By the end of 1962, had this experiment succeeded? Success in this experiment – consistent with the regions' past experiences between the highland's indigenous communities and foreigners – would bring even greater exposure to the growing conflict in South Vietnam.

A security dilemma in the mountains

Late in 1961 two Americans walked into the Rhade Montagnard village of Buon Enao. One of the men carried a canvas medical bag over his shoulder. Both were in civilian clothes and unarmed. The man with the medical kit was Paul Campbell. Campbell had almost a decade of experience in the care and treatment of the medical problems of lesser developed countries.[4]

Buon Enao consisted then of fifteen or twenty thatched longhouses. Built on pilings in the Rhade way, the elevated houses would keep animals out of the dwellings and weather floods well. There were no younger men present, but some of the village's women and children, a shaman, and the village elder watched the Americans. David Nuttle, an International Volunteer Services (IVS) official working on an agricultural project and Campbell's companion, spoke to the village elder. Campbell recalled that the the IVS project aimed "to improve living facilities, agricultural facilities and medical

facilities'' of the Montagnards.[5] In the Rhade dialect Nuttle explained that Campbell had medicines and medical skills and would look at any sick villagers. The elder's daughter, a frail girl in black pajamas, was ill with a fever.[6]

Campbell examined the girl as the shaman looked on. Campbell, through Nuttle, told the shaman that he possessed medicine that might help the girl. It would work only if the shaman helped administer it using his strong, personal medicine. The Rhade were animists, and propitiation to the spirits for significant events was common. Perhaps they made a sacrifice of a chicken, examined its entrails. Campbell gave the girl an injection of antibiotics. As Campbell reflected later:

> The little girl with the black pajamas is probably who can be blamed for either the success or failure whatever you want to look at it of the whole Buon Enao concept. She was the little girl who was sick, who I treated and finally got well.[7]

Over the next several weeks these two Americans looked at, and Campbell treated, other Rhade in Buon Enao and other villages in the hamlet. The little girl, and most others, got well.[8]

This simple act of compassion and duty helped forge a bond of trust between the Rhade of Buon Enao and the Americans. The program, which would grow in part from the Campbell experience, involved US Army Special Forces, the South Vietnamese, Rhade and other Montagnard communities and many elements of the US Mission in Vietnam. The appellation ''Peace Corps with guns,'' sometimes chuckled over by Special Forces veterans, would come to characterize the contribution of these unique soldiers to this war.[9]

Campbell determined from his visits and conversations with Rhade village elders and other Montagnards that insurgents – the Viet Cong – pressured these people and their communities. The Montagnards mostly armed themselves with bamboo spears. South Vietnamese authorities largely disarmed highlanders, taking their crossbows, in the late 1950s after protests over government-sponsored migration into the Central Highlands of ethnic Vietnamese. Colonel Gilbert Layton, who had funded Nuttle's efforts around Ban Me Thuot and sent Campbell up there, determined that a village-based program might keep the Montagnards out of insurgent control or influence.[10]

Assessment, assistance, and trust

US Army Colonel Gilbert Layton took a chance. Layton – who dealt with the Central Intelligence Agency and the South Vietnamese Presidential Survey Office from his position in the MAAG's Combined Studies Division, J3 (joint operations directorate) in South Vietnam – sent Sergeant First Class

Campbell into the remote villages and hamlets of Darlac province, near Ban Me Thout. Highlander communities found themselves caught between the Vietnamese in-migration and the insurgents. These highlands bordered Laos and Cambodia and were routes for infiltration from the north. One assessment found that "about 80 % of the land is mountainous and comprises the home of the Montagnards; as a result, whomever the Montagnards supported held an excellent chance to control the whole region."[11] Colonel Layton seized an opportunity to establish a defensive presence in the highlands. The experiment that became the Village Defense Program began in November 1961, in Vietnam's Central Highlands. Although begun at almost the same time as the better-known Strategic Hamlet Program, Layton's initiative in the highlands was very different.

Establishing rapport

Colonel Layton provided some funds for Nuttle's agricultural projects in Darlac province in July 1961. After visiting the district capital of Ban Me Thuot, Layton talked to some of his Vietnamese intelligence contacts about the area. A small medical program for Rhade Montagnards grew out of Campbell's visit to Buon Enao and other villages in the vicinity. In October, Layton and Nuttle met often with Buon Enao's leaders. The Americans explained the need for Rhade cooperation. Among other things, villagers would receive arms, training, and assistance in village defense. Cooperation involved the Rhade denouncing the Viet Cong – the South Vietnamese derisive term for communist insurgents – and declaring support for the government.[12]

Insurgents had attacked and occupied a village near Buon Enao in late October 1961. This attack lent urgency to Rhade consideration and commitment. November saw the arrival at Buon Enao of the first Montagnard volunteers. Training began after these volunteers formally mustered in under the Republic of Vietnam flag then declared their opposition to the Viet Cong and support for the government. Initially these Montagnards learned how to construct defensive shelters for the protection of their villages. Trainers taught them how militarily to use arms, first with their few traditional crossbows and bamboo spears, then with American surplus arms like the M-1 carbine. The volunteers built an enclosure around Buon Enao, which became a training center. Seven men of Special Forces Operational Detachment (ODA) A-35 and ten of their Vietnamese counterparts – nine of whom were either Rhade or Jarai Montagnards – began arming and organizing these first volunteers on December, 3 1961.[13]

The mission of this combined Special Forces element called for arming and training these volunteers to return home able to defend their families and villages. A strike force formed soon. It would provide an immediate reaction capability for any village attacked and in danger of being overrun. With the security of Buon Enao established, these volunteers began to extend a

secure area to forty or so other villages within ten to fifteen kilometers of Buon Enao. The province chief of Darlac was a part of this decision. He also allowed the substitution of new activities run by Americans, instead of Vietnamese, to help the Montagnards develop education and medical aid centers. Planned Vietnamese government programs had not gotten off the ground because of insurgent presence in the province.[14] In Buon Enao and its environs, around Christmas 1961, what had been a problematic security situation changed. The Rhade had learned to protect themselves (see Map 2).[15]

Montagnard volunteers soon put aside their few crossbows and spears and picked up American carbines. In addition to marksmanship, the program of instruction included the skills of ambush, counter-ambush, and patrolling. The South Vietnamese province chief of Darlac had approved the concept. One assessment found that

> the GVN [Government of Vietnam] could not protect the villagers from the VC, failed to fulfill its promises to the tribesmen, was distributing Montagnard lands to Vietnamese and aiding the Vietnamese settlers and finally, medical and educational aid had been discontinued because of VC activities.[16]

American Special Forces soldiers and their ARVN counterparts trained Rhade cadres to conduct these lessons, serving then only as advisors.[17] At the same time, civic and humanitarian action schemes began with Special Forces soldiers and their participation was the catalyst.[18]

Non-combat multipliers

Montagnard civic action teams went into the villages teaching the use of simple tools and more efficient farming methods. Medics like Sergeant First Class Campbell started a program to train Montagnard village health workers or nurses. These trained highlanders helped initiate medical coverage. Clinic construction began in some villages. These measures met with widespread Rhade support. New volunteers and more villages asked for help and renounced the insurgents. " 'Within the first week the [Rhade] tribesmen were lining up at the front gate to get into the program,' " according to one Special Forces sergeant. " 'We didn't have to do much recruiting. Word spread fast from village to village.' " Villages, once fully mobilized and trained, became Area Development Centers (ADCs), linking defense and development actions. Together with strike forces – to serve as immediate reaction forces to help villages or hamlets in trouble – ADCs would help spread stability.[19] These Montagnard actions spoke loudly in support of the success of what had become the Village Defense Program.[20]

Village elders swore allegiance to the Saigon government and vouched for the loyalty of each volunteer. Suspected Viet Cong sympathizers who

volunteered found themselves often denounced by their neighbors. Indigenous leaders rehabilitated these agents in an innovative program. Their rehabilitation efforts split the former agents' time between building new homes in secure villages and political re-indoctrination. Some 80 percent of these suspected insurgents renounced the war against their people and the government. There were no escapes.[21]

The vulnerability of Rhade communities was a real problem for the Saigon regime. Discussions among Colonel Layton and his South Vietnamese counterparts

> revealed that the GVN could not protect the villages from the VC, failed to fulfill its promises to the tribesmen, was distributing Montagnard lands to Vietnamese and aiding the Vietnamese settlers and finally, medical and educational aid had been discontinued because of VC activities.[22]

The number and status of outreach programs initiated provided essential measures of effectiveness or metrics. Were government programs available and did these function? Not until Layton saw the potential for reaching out to the Montagnard communities. Critical programs included local security as well as health, education, and economic development. If these programs were not present or could not begin or function because of insurgent threats and violence, then an area and its population needed attention. Either the Saigon government would mobilize these areas and their populations or the insurgents would. Colonel Layton's analysis of the security situation in the highlands found opportunity and challenge.[23]

Forty other hamlets and villages around Buon Enao mobilized after the initial group of volunteers received arms and training. This extended the reach of affected Montagnards ten to fifteen kilometers around the first defended areas. At this time, a split team – half of an A-team – arrived from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for a six-month tour of temporary duty.[24] The balance of ODA A-35 deployed to Buon Enao in February 1962. With the increase in Special Forces personnel, mobilization expanded to reach another forty villages and hamlets. Montagnard cadre conducted the training with the Americans acting in an advisory capacity.

Additional Special Forces manpower, applied to mobilization and training efforts, increased Montagnard acceptance and trust. Tables of organization and equipment documents did not exist for this sort of village-based self-defense, so the Special Forces team based organization on local requirements. Unusual support channels facilitated this organizational flexibility. The CIA – through the Combined Studies Division – provided all classes of supply from outside of ARVN or Military Advisory and Assistance Group channels. Support ranged from food, medical supplies, indigenous-sized uniforms and Bata boots. Other support measures included money to pay for local goods and services such as labor.

Military civic action began in mobilized villages and hamlets. Indigenous health workers received training from Special Forces medics – themselves graduates of intensive, year-long programs and virtually the equivalents of physician's assistants – and began to conduct sick calls for previously unserved Montagnard communities. "Community development" also included "two six man Montagnard extension teams [that] trained the villagers in crop care, simple tool making and blacksmithing." These efforts also attracted more Montagnard interest in as yet unmobilized villages and hamlets.[25]

Other training centers opened around Buon Enao and began to take advantage of growing Montagnard interest and increased local security. Between December 1961 and April 1962, 972 village defenders received training as well as an additional 300 strike force members. As Special Forces assets became available, they established other ADCs in and around the hamlets of Buon Ho, Buon Krong, Ea Ana, Lac Tien, and Buon Tah. Area Development Centers provided the focal points for mobilization and training among the Montagnards as well as humanitarian civic action and limited psychological operations. These ADCs had several missions:

> (a) establish a base camp for training Strike force and village defenders; (b) conduct an Area Development Program to bring the local population under government influence; (c) employ paramilitary forces in combat operations to train hamlet militias, carry out interdiction activities, and conduct joint operations with ARVN units with such operations furthered the CIDG effort; (d) conduct PSYOP operations to develop popular support for the GVN; (e) establish an area intelligence program including, but not limited, to reconnaissance patrols, observations posts and agent information networks; (f) conduct a CA program; and (g) where appropriate, establish border screen in sectors along the RVN international border. During the development phase, all reasonable means were to be taken to improve the economic situation of the local population by purchasing materials and hiring local labor for construction and operation of the camp.[26]

Armed, modestly trained Montagnard men protected forty villages with a population of 14,000. From April to October 1962, what became known as the Buon Enao complex grew to 200 villages with a population of 60,000. These Montagnards received local security from 10,600 village defenders and 1,500 strike force members or strikers. In late 1962 Darlac province had a Rhade population estimated at 70,000 out of a total population of 140,000. Because of security pressures throughout the Central Highlands, Montagnard communities were on the move. These migrations brought new Montagnard communities of Jarai and Mnong into contact with mobilized Rhade.[27]

Armed social work

Trained to live among indigenous populations, gain their confidence, and develop and organize resistance, Special Forces did exactly that with the Montagnards. At a time when the US Army and rest of the Department of Defense had counterinsurgency roles forced on it by an impatient President Kennedy and some of his civilian advisors, Special forces soldiers began such an operation in the Central Highlands.[28]

Hunkered down next to small fires in remote villages, the soldiers of Special Forces wore their tribal bracelets, helped dig village wells, delivered Montagnard babies, and assisted the Rhade and other Montagnards in teaching themselves how to defend their families and villages. In Buon Enao and in dozens of other villages and hamlets, Special Forces soldiers won the confidence of their residents and gave them the skills and support to defend and improve their lives.

Reinforce success

Captain Ron Shackleton's Special Forces Operational Detachment, A-113, arrived in Vietnam in February 1962. The team headed for Buon Enao, replacing the previous detachment. Team A-113 was a textbook operational detachment of the period. The noncommissioned officers were all "triple volunteers": long-serving soldiers, not conscripts; parachutists, somewhat of a distinction within the US Army; then these men had asked for assignment to and qualified as Special Forces soldiers. These soldiers passed through both an official difficult training regimen and an unofficial, highly selective, peer training and evaluation process on the teams and in their units.

Shackleton's team sergeant was a Korean War veteran. He had spent a tour in Vietnam training rangers. Two of the other sergeants spoke Vietnamese and two more spoke French.[29] Far from the pleasures of Saigon, Shackleton and his men lived with their Rhade hosts, sharing their simple lives, participating in some village rituals, and earning Montagnard respect.

The Village Defense Program succeeded and expanded. Between December 1961 and April 1962, a forty-village complex grew up around Buon Enao.[30] The Central Intelligence Agency, not bound by bureaucratic problems such as non-existent organizational tables or documents, provided flexible support and money for civic and humanitarian action as well as military items and supplies. Special Forces team leaders had operational funds for use the immediate support of support or civic action endeavors.[31]

Support

January 1962 saw Special Forces soldiers, on temporary duty from Okinawa or the United States, involved in several advisory and training activities in

South Vietnam. The Vietnamese Special Forces, spread between clandestine border operations and in-country political intrigue, began to receive training as did ARVN ranger units. Different paramilitary efforts received most of the attention of the American Special Forces as teams rotated in and out of South Vietnam. US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) activated in Saigon in February 1962 to oversee the burgeoning advisory and assistance efforts. MACV included a Special Warfare Branch within its joint operations section or J3. Special Warfare Branch assumed the paramilitary responsibilities previously borne by the Combined Studies Division.

The rapid growth of paramilitary efforts stressed the capability of an ad hoc support system provided by the CIA and Combined Studies Division. MACV recognized this unique arrangement by May 10 1962 and attempted to provide better joint support. The rapid expansion of paramilitary efforts also stressed the capability of the South Vietnamese to provide leadership at tactical levels. Support for the far-flung projects was outside those of either the US Army or ARVN channels. A Counterinsurgency Support Office became operational on Okinawa that would range the Far East for contracts, materials, and fabrication. Acquisition of all classes of supply and delivery via contract air means were within the purview of this fluid logistics lash-up.

Pay for strikers was made in local currency. These piasters also paid for labor and local purchase of foodstuffs. Weapons, largely obsolete American small arms but unique foreign weapons as well, came out of this supply line. Uniforms, suitable footwear, jungle boots – Bata boots so called because of their manufacturer – in small sizes to accommodate the diminutive size of the Montagnards and Vietnamese – as well as field equipment required contracting and fabrication. Delivery often came via contract Short Takeoff or Landing (STOL) aircraft – the C-123, C-7, or smaller aircraft like the De Haviland Otter. This unusual delivery included the disbursement of funds that might come in the form of a duffle bag full of piasters kicked from a helicopter to the waiting Special Forces team. US Special Forces soldiers began to find themselves often directly responsible for operations and support of their respective parts of this small war.[32]

In the spring of 1962 Rhade defenders repulsed Viet Cong attacks on the villages of Buon Tong Sing and Buon Hra Ea Hning, fighting for their homes and families. In May, however, the villages of Buon Cu Bong and Buon Tong Dok fell to insurgent infiltration with thirty-four weapons seized. Rhade resolve was firm. Montagnard leaders ordered the villages burned and the survivors dispersed to nearby villages to send a strong message to all Rhade. As Viet Cong pressure turned to villages outside of the Buon Enao complex, thousands of refugees fled to Buon Enao. Unlike most other parts of South Vietnam, these Montagnard refugees returned to their villages with armed, trained village defenders and American support to build new homes and plant new crops.[33]

Success and change

Other paramilitary projects

In addition to Colonel Layton's projects in Darlac province with the Rhade and Special Forces, the so-called Buon Enao experiment, Combined Studies Division controlled other paramilitary programs. "During the period of the Buon Enao experiment with the Rhade," one unit history recorded, "a number of other programs were initiated by the CSD in an effort to extend governmental control over areas either lost to the GVN, or where control was strongly contested." The objective of these efforts aimed at raising paramilitary forces among other ethnic and religious minority groups. In conjunction with the Area Development Centers that extended out of Buon Enao in the spring of 1962, these other projects fell under the official designation of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) Program.[34]

About the same time the first volunteers had arrived in Buon Enao, province chiefs from across the highlands region selected Montagnards from their resident, indigenous communities. These men went to Hue. All vetted in French military service, province officials screened them again. This group received training in techniques appropriate to the growing conflict: infiltration, intelligence-gathering, civic action, and psychological operations.[35]

These Montagnards became a cadre and began training Mountain Scouts. This group of scouts, the first group of 350 finished their training in January 1962, and returned to their home areas in the highlands. There they worked in small, independent groups, and prosletyze other Montagnards. While doing so, they developed information about insurgent presence and operations. One report claimed that the number of Viet Cong in neighboring kontum province fell from 5,000 at the end of 1961 to just 500 in March 1962. Mobilization efforts among the Montagnards showed results.[36]

As Special Forces ODA A-35 began to organize and train the first cadres in Buon Enao the previous fall, the balance of that team arrived at the previously constructed Special Forces Hoa Cam Training Center. Near Danang, Hoa Cam served as a base for training additional paramilitary programs and courses. Other activities included the Border Surveillance, Fighting Fathers, and Catholic Youth programs. Border Surveillance personnel performed primarily intelligence-gathering operations along the Laotian and Cambodian borders. Fighting Fathers and Catholic Youth training initiatives dealt with Catholic populations, often refugees from North Vietnam, located in remote areas of South Vietnam. Their training and orientation differed from that of the hamlet or village defender projects. Under Combined Studies Division auspices (supported by the Central Intelligence Agency and carried out by Special Forces soldiers) these projects also coalesced into the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program.[37]

This broad-based enterprise incorporated greater civic action, humanitarian relief, as well as psychological and military operations against the burgeoning insurgency. Civil affairs and psychological operations elements were not organic to the special forces detachments. Projects came about individually in response to local need as well as the ability of the team to pull together resources to get a well dug or advice on alternative crops. According to the CIA's William Colby, who was then a liaison to President Diem, the intent of what became the CIDG was "build strength in the rural communities from the bottom up, arming the local inhabitants so they could participate in their own defense, and gradually to extend the area of security like Lyautey's *tache d'huile*."[38]

Reorganization: Operation Switchback

In February 1962 the Military Assistance Advisory Group became Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. As demand for US Army Special Forces assistance grew, institutional pressures began to pull control of ostensibly army assets away from the Combined Studies Division. Decision-makers in Washington decided to shift control, and ultimately the operational azimuth, of this collection of successful projects to the military, under Operation Switchback. This operation came about as the demand for Special Forces personnel increased with the success of the Buon Enao experiment, expansion of other paramilitary programs, increase in advisor ceilings, and the associated increase in training requirements for specialized skills like ranger and airborne qualification. Defense Secretary McNamara approved it in a conference in Honolulu in July 1962.[39]

Switchback would run between November 1962 and such time in 1963 as the assistance command could assume responsibility for all support. Camps and projects would revert to South Vietnamese control as soon as US Army Special Forces personnel established security and the support of indigenous, mostly minority, populations. The South Vietnamese Special Forces would begin to play a larger role in these remote areas.[40]

The initial operational intent of the Village Defense Program – carried over into the CIDG – focused on establishing security and developing political goodwill towards the regime in Saigon. This focus arose out of a very real security and credibility crisis in Vietnam's remote regions, especially among mostly minority populations. The new operational objectives of Switchback would soon be offensive and military. As US Army Special Forces assets became available, when camps and projects reverted to South Vietnamese control, their follow-on missions would involve interdiction of infiltration routes into the South in the sparsely populated Cambodian and Laotian borders. Targeting the Viet Cong militarily, not mobilizing minority populations, became the new mission of Switchback.

By the fall of 1962 there were twenty-six operational detachments in Vietnam, three command and control teams, and an augmentation detachment

composed of a headquarters support element. In September US Army Special Forces (Provisional) Vietnam took control of all Special Forces operations – and their 400 men – in the country, under the command of Colonel George Morton. An experienced operator, Morton had fought in World War Two, and served with the Philippine Scouts and with the Royal Hellenic Raiding Forces during the Greek Civil War. Colonel Morton's men continued to rotate as whole teams from their home stations on Okinawa or at Fort Bragg.[41]

By the time ODA-113 rotated back to Okinawa in August 1962, other teams replaced it. The efforts of these Special Forces elements continued and expanded. The number of viable armed villages and camps soon included 129 Rhade communities. Between April and October the number grew to 10,600 armed, trained villagers and a 1,500-man strike force defended these villages and hamlets in Darlac province. The medical operation had 280 Montagnard medics drawn from their own communities.[42]

Operational context

Headquarters, US Army Special Forces (Provisional) Vietnam, commanded by Colonel George Morton, assumed operational control of all Special Forces elements in South Vietnam on February 1 1962. Their command and control structure included an Operational Detachment "B" or B-team (nominally a company headquarters in Special Forces) in each of the four corps tactical zones. The communications linking the ODAs to their respective B team and the B teams to Saigon was a manual, high-frequency morse code network, with base stations and relays at Nha Trang and Saigon. Colonel Morton's command reported at first to Layton's Combined Studies Division at Military Assistance Command, Vietnam in Saigon.

Snapshot

A sort of routine for Special Forces assets developed throughout the Military Regions and the CIDG. Teams, after executing pre-mission preparation at or Bragg or on Okinawa, deployed to South Vietnam (see Map 3). An Area Support Officer or ASO walked the teams through in-country orientation in Saigon with CSD and MACV as well as in Nha Trang with the Special Forces headquarters. If time and transportation permitted, the teams passed through the Corps Tactical Zone headquarters where the command and control detachments – based on Special Forces "B" detachments (ODBs) – co-located near ARVN and American advisory activities as well as provincial administration. This happened to ODA 331, from Okinawa and 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), for their August 1962–February 1963 tour of duty.[43]

This ODA got to its camp near Dalat on September 28 1962. Missions included organization, training, and equipping village defenders and strike

forces as well establishing a training camp. Once trained forces existed, the ODA's orders called for conducting combat patrols. This patrolling would establish a presence so Koho Montagnard refugees could return to their homes. According to an "Operational Summary," "Montagnards hate VC but also fear them – will flee VC controlled area and come to refugee villages when able." Appended in longhand in the archival record, this summary also read, "Distrust and dislike VN [Vietnamese] because of past hist. of aggression." Soon, two strike force companies began to conduct local security, to protect training and the re-occupied villages.

The ODA paid laborers to support camp construction and related tasks, injecting cash into the local economy. Strike force members also received pay twice monthly. Cadre received training first in groups of six to ten. This facilitated working with larger groups of Montagnard strikers – in groups of seventy to eighty-five – and village or hamlet defenders – in groups of fifty to ninety – trainees. Village health workers received training from Special Forces medics. These indigenous health workers conducted sick calls in Montagnard villages and hamlets. Training activities quickly yielded 439 trained strikers, 609 village defenders, and twelve village health workers. When sufficient numbers of village defenders became available, the ODA and Montagnards began patrolling.[44]

Village defenders went home, with their weapons. Strikers patrolled with Special Forces advisors among them. Patrols made contact in October, November, and December and newly defended villages repulsed infiltrators. Improvements in the security situation and aggressive patrolling allowed some 3,000 refugees to return home. By January 1963, some village defenders demobilized and South Vietnamese provincial officials insisted on the turn-in of their weapons.[45] The pace of ARVN operations also increased. Despite the successes in this isolated area of north, central South Vietnam, the ODA encountered problems characteristic of the entire CIDG program.

South Vietnam military and civilian elements were not prepared for either the support of or coordination with the newly trained, paramilitary Montagnards. Military areas of operation did not overlap those of the political boundaries and competing agendas and missions made coordination and exchange of intelligence difficult. Interpreters were always in short supply. Problems with timely logistic support, especially for arms and ammunition, slowed training at times as MACV attempted to construct a support system to supplant the in-place system of the CIA. Exacerbating these shortages was a recent change of policy now aimed at limiting arms to Montagnards: "Changes in policy drastically affect success of program – e.g., taking weapons from village defenders." Another widespread support problem was the unwillingness of provincial officials to pay village health workers. For ODA 331, this is what stopped the training program, not a lack of willing volunteers or a drop-off in demonstrated need. This ODA also provided recommendations based on "lessons learned" working with the highlanders

and Vietnamese:

1. When working with Montagnards never promise anything you cannot positively produce. They have been promised so much by VN and received so very little, they are quick to like you if you produce and vice versa.
2. If possible, arrange for ARVN to participate in operations with Montagnards. It is sometimes hard to persuade Montagnards they are not fighting "Vietnamese" war for them, only to end up at bottom of heap as they were before.
3. Medical program is key to success in opening up a new area.
4. Vietnamese are slow in everything – takes time to get used to their way. Their reactions to intelligence: it is passed on more for information than for action. Most officials very capable individuals but lack initiative – therefore lost time when planning and making decisions.[46]

"This early project," in the words of the 5th Special Forces Group history of this period, "developed several features which would characterize most Special Forces programs – the combination of military training and civic action, the placing of responsibility upon the emerging Montagnard leaders as quickly as possible, now better known as 'Vietnamization'."[47]

Additional Special Forces elements – at the behest of the CIA – conducted other training activities concurrent with the Buon Enao pilot program of village-based self-defense and military civic action. These efforts reached out of Darlac province and what was then Military Region 2 (and became Corps Tactical Area II) across South Vietnam. In the fiercely contested, heavily populated Delta region, Fighting Fathers and Catholic Youth organizations received training. Trailwatchers comprised of Montagnard volunteers deployed in June 1962 after reconnaissance training to gather intelligence on infiltration and interdict as possible along the international borders with Cambodia and Laos. Training centers at Hoa Cam and Plei Yt were busy. Other Montagnards joined the Mountain Commandos (later Mountain Scouts) and received training in combat patrolling skills for long-range, independent action, when once returned to their home villages and hamlets. Civic action cadres received training at these centers as well, to provide essential enabling efforts in agricultural and economic development. These efforts also provided support for psychological operations themes of legitimacy for the Saigon government. Some civic action workers would also support the GVN's Strategic Hamlet Program.[48]

From Village Defense Program to Switchback

Operation Switchback grew out of concerns about the continued ability of the unusual arrangement between the MACV's J3 Special Warfare division

and Combined Studies Division to control and support rapidly growing, far-flung paramilitary efforts. When CSD requested sixteen additional ODAs in June 1962, DoD seriously decided to place operations under military control. Operation Switchback began with a directive from DoD on July 23 1962. This directed that control of overt paramilitary efforts would pass to an American Special Forces colonel and called for a headquarters element as well.[49]

Colonel George Morton assumed command of USASF(P)V in September 1962. His "command" numbered twenty-six ODAs on temporary duty in country at the end of November. Morton had worked for the Combined Studies Division of the Joint Operations (J3) in the headquarters. With Special Forces personnel as augmentation, he organized a Special Forces Operating Base north up the coast of South Vietnam, in Nha Trang. On September 14–15, the new headquarters received seventy-two personnel from the US. Nha Trang was near the center of the country and its coastal location would facilitate sea-borne logistics support. With this new headquarters in place, Operation Switchback finally began on November 1 1962.[50]

The Special Forces Operating Base (SFOB) drew from the resources and structure of an Operational Detachment "C" (ODC or C team) with assets for control of operations, logistics coordination, and tactical signal support. Three ODBs or B teams assumed responsibility of the twenty-six ODAs operational across South Vietnam in November 1962, one in each of the military regions. This new command and control organizational structure assumed tactical and operational responsibilities on January 1 1963.[51]

Control, less command, remained split between Colonel Morton's new headquarters and the Combined Studies Division, with its ties to the CIA. Operational A teams involved in village-based defense and development programs were now the responsibility of the Special Forces Operating Base. Operational A teams devoted to other paramilitary efforts like Border Surveillance, Mountain Scouts, and Trailwatchers still reported to CSD in Saigon. Rhade and other Montagnard, village-based programs and ADCs were in Military Region II, in the Central Highlands. Many of the newest ODAs deployed to South Vietnam advised and trained these latter projects close to the vague international borders with Cambodia and Laos, in Military Regions I and III.[52]

MACV directed USASF(P)V to increase offensive operations as Colonel Morton's SFOB assumed control. The end of 1962 saw a "joint directive" issued from Saigon directing an increase in offensive operations. Up to half of an ADC or camp's strike forces would now conduct patrolling, ambush, or other activities at any given time. This was another signal of the shift from the defensive and political foci that had contributed to the success of the Buon Enao experiment.[53]

Assessment

Village-level security *could* provide the basis for denying VC insurgents access to the mobilized communities. As the Village Defense Program and other paramilitary training and advisory efforts combined into the CIDG, 25,051 village defenders and over 6,500 strike force troops guarded their villages and patrolled the forests and jungles surrounding their fields and homes by early 1963. This initial American-driven, counterinsurgency experiment was a success.[54]

The variables in the Village Defense Program experiment included the participants and their respective capabilities, limitations, and stake in the outcome. The Montagnards, the American Special Forces soldiers, South Vietnamese province administrators and the ARVN as well as the insurgents engaged with different levels of intensity at different times. Positive Montagnard memories of their dealings with and by the French contributed to a positive context for dealing with Caucasian foreigners, especially if they brought firearms.

Several observers commented on the relative success of Montagnard mobilization. Analyst Douglas Blaufarb commented on one aspect of the CIA-sponsored experiment that took place in Vietnam's Central Highlands:

> In a little more than thirteen months some thirty-eight thousand tribesmen were armed and over two hundred villages were incorporated into the scheme with a population of about three hundred thousand. The inducement for the tribespeople was self-protection against the Viet Cong together with such programs as training for medical aides, dispensaries, education, and similar small-scale improvements in their lives.[55]

This successful experiment was the CIDG program. Major General Victor H. Krulak, the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities, reported after an in-country inspection that:

> Montagnard fighters, along with the village defenders, the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps are going to be the decisive factor in the war . . . the battle will largely be won in the hamlets and in the countryside by the less sophisticated elements.[56]

Operational results showed operational and strategic promise during the period that Special Forces initially worked for the CIA. "The CIA considered the program a rousing success," according to historian Andrew Krepinevich,

> and for good reason: by the end of 1962 the CIDG political action program had recovered and secured several hundred villages, some

> three hundred thousand civilians, and several hundred square miles of territory from the VC, utilizing some thirty eight thousand armed civilian irregulars.[57]

These measures of effectiveness – trained militiamen and strikers as well as villages and their populations under positive control – represent metrics consistent with those discovered by Bernard Fall as a result of his analysis of the French during the First Indochina War. The French had not measured population-based data like school enrollments and tax collection information but instead emphasized numbers of sorties and tons of bombs dropped, and the like.

Senate Majority Leader Michael Mansfield reported after a visit to Vietnam, at the close of 1962, that

> exceptional progress has been made in winning over the Montagnards by the special forces. This is an important achievement because the location of these tribal people has considerable strategic significance in terms of north–south supply trails. But it should also be recognized that in terms of the major struggle the Montagnards are peripheral. In the last analysis, the Saigon government will stand or fall on the basis not of the several hundred thousand primitive Montagnards, but the millions of Vietnamese in the villages, towns and cities.[58]

The Majority Leader's cautionary note was significant. Translating successful principles and techniques from the mobilization of Montagnard communities would have to take place on a larger scale in South Vietnam to benefit the counterinsurgency effort. Organizational learning and adaptation were necessary.

William Colby – OSS veteran, later a director of the CIA, but the Saigon station chief in the early 1960s – made a distinction in his foreword to Robert Komer's thin volume of Vietnam War analysis between an American preference for "fighting our kind of 'soldier's war' while the enemy made it very clear that he was fighting a 'people's war.' " Colby also cited Ambassador Komer's realization that the challenge was to be "raising the 'other' war to equivalence to the military war."[59] Komer drew heavily on his August 1972 RAND Corporation study, *Bureaucracy Does its Thing: Institutional Constraints on US/GVN Performance in Vietnam*. He examined how the US invested so much effort for so long without positive results. That study relied on Komer's first-hand experience from both Washington, DC early in the war and his later position as head of revolutionary development during 1967–1968.

There was an appreciation that the conflict in Vietnam *was* different, from the very beginning:

> much evidence exists of realistic analysis and high-level grasp of the nature of the problem we confronted in Vietnam itself. After all, we

> had plenty of time to learn – including some twenty years between 1945 and our direct intervention in 1965.[60]

There were constraints to applying American resources to Vietnamese problems. Komer recognized the CIDG program was one of the few successful adaptations, though he got some details wrong. "This was," according to Komer, "a particularly cost-effective use of indigenous manpower (support of the CIDG was transferred from CIA to MACV in 1964)."[61] Komer also singled out the CIA as "far more imaginative and flexible than the military in encouraging and supporting various types of counterinsurgency-oriented paramilitary forces, notably the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups."[62]

A Special Forces unit history written in the 1970s identified the "strain of doctrine versus necessity" in its characterization of CIDG operations: "Special Forces developed a method of operation largely based on past successful movements, born of the need to operate successfully in situations requiring military expertise and political finesse." Special Forces soldiers found that

> experience complemented and contradicted doctrine and the methodology developed as the most essential feature of Special Forces operations which enabled USASF to successfully perform rapidly changing and continually expanding missions. Nevertheless, the strain of doctrine versus necessity has its effect on the Special Forces soldiers who shaped the CIDG program, and more important too, was the flexibility required by their own country and the hot country, and various ethnic and religious minority groups with whom they daily lived and worked.[63]

Operation Switchback began a new counterinsurgency dynamic as the CIDG grew from the Village Defense Program. Colonel Morton found much required of him and his borrowed Special Forces manpower as they struggled to get and keep control over this growing, now countrywide enterprise. The insurgency, South Vietnamese national intrigues, and American concerns in Vietnam and Washington about the whole of the political and military struggle would shape the actions and future of the Special Forces there. These efforts and struggles would in turn affect the CIDG program. From initial success, came change.

The competing strategic concepts and plans did agree on the need to mobilize popular support to oppose the burgeoning insurgency. A fundamental consideration in developing this popular support required establishing local security for the target population. Civic action and psychological warfare support would enhance security measures and assist the accomplishment of follow-on objectives. Ideally the objectives would address contested issues like land reform or tenure, local political structures, or modernization. Once established, measures to deny access and support to the insurgents as well as bolster the policies and programs of the Diem regime might take place.

If the Buon Enao pilot program was an experiment, two critical variables were the Montagnards and American Special Forces. The latter were able to recognize the strengths of the former while providing a shield against Vietnamese antagonists, from north and south.

Mobilized Montagnard communities focused their loyalty and respect on the Americans sharing their lives and dangers. South Vietnamese military and civilian elements proved unable or unwilling to integrate newly secured Montagnard villages and hamlets into either security plans or administrative governance. As South Vietnamese shortcomings became more pronounced, resentment grew among the Montagnards. Americans, civilian and military, failed to appreciate that these limitations meant that hopes to make counterinsurgency programs self-sustaining by the South Vietnamese would go unfulfilled. Allowed to grow, this risk might make what should be a Vietnamese war into an American one.

Continuities with the mobilization of Montagnard communities during the First Indochina War helped create a receptivity to the entreaties of the Americans. The involvement of Americans as interlocutors between highlanders and Vietnamese, while consistent with the historical experience of the region, also created conditions that created tensions between the South Vietnamese and American advisors, especially over the issue of arming of Montagnards. The distance brought about by the positioning of Americans between highlanders and the South Vietnamese would ultimately cause problems, creating a political space for ethnonationalism to flourish. Another critical fault line opened as security tremors subsided: Americans were the catalyst for this emerging doctrine-in-action of counterinsurgency, not Vietnamese.

2 Combatants and continuities

The mobilization of Montagnard communities for self-defense built on precedents from the First Indochina War. American assistance to the newly independent Philippines against communist guerrillas from 1945 to 1960 provided other precedents, known to Special Forces soldiers and other Americans, for countering insurgents. Taken together, these continuities provided a context for cooperation, experimentation, and adaptation. Who were these highlanders and Americans? Beginning with the visit of a combat medic to a few isolated communities, Montagnards and US Army Special Forces teams together began a village-based, self-defense program that protected scores of hamlets and villages within a year's time. What was it about the US Army Special Forces – trained to incite and sustain resistance forces and partisan warfare – that enabled them to create the first successful counterinsurgency program while much of the rest of the American military struggled with definitions? Were there historical precedents for successful mobilization and techniques and principles to counter an insurgency?

Vietnam varied along ethnic, regional, and religious boundaries much more significant than the recent political borders drawn so far away in 1954. The Diem regime had suppressed potential centers of influence and power with their successful campaigns against the organized criminal overlords of Saigon, religious sects, and nascent political opposition in the several years before the communist insurgency flared into open resistance. The resettlement into the Central Highlands of recently arrived refugees from the north was the beginning of another assault on Montagnard sensibilities as well as a threat to their way of life (see Map 1). Vietnam's Montagnards were part of the uneasy ethnic and religious diversity created by the Geneva Accords. The efforts of the American Special Forces reached these secluded highlanders in part because of continuities in the Montagnard collective experience.

From the quiet forest

Sons of the mountains

A few ethnohistorians have focused on Montagnard existence in some detail. Montagnard life in Vietnam's highlands was a collective endeavor. Part of

the Mon-Khmer ethnolinguistic group, Montagnards differed in ethnicity, culture, religion, and language from the Vietnamese. These highland people relied on shifting agriculture of rice to support their matrilineal kinship-based settlements. Small village communities would move as they exhausted swidden fields, hunting grounds, and forest forage areas. Villages of hardwood longhouses sat on high ground, built on pilings. Kinship groups based on mothers' families shared these longhouses and work. Women planted rice, foraged in the forest, and wove. Men cleared fields, built longhouses, and hunted. Both men and women served as shamans, communicating with the animist spirits that influence most aspects of Montagnard life. Very much in harmony with nature, these communities shared heavier work burdens and lived in an ecology of balance between the environment, subsistence, the souls of their forebears, and spirits of the forests and mountains.[1]

Some contact with lowland populations had always taken place for trade. Cambodians and Vietnamese had taken Montagnards as slaves as recently as the late nineteenth century. Perhaps it is from this period that lowland peoples, especially the Vietnamese, developed a chauvinist attitude towards the highlanders. The Vietnamese referred to Montagnards as *moi* or savages and scorned their simple ways.

The Rhade community

Rhade villages in Darlac province were some of the most striking in the highlands. Longhouses framed from forest hardwoods, walled with split bamboo, and roofed with thatch, usually faced the same direction, based on a shaman's consultation. The choice of timber for the house also reflected a positive regard for animist omens. Religious rituals played a large role in the Rhade matrilineal society. The Rhade cultivated vegetables, fruit, and upland dry rice. Rhade and other Montagnards also hunted, trapped, and fished. Traditionally these highland peoples produced their own cloth, weapons, and tools. Women wove on looms set up in the great rooms of longhouses. Men fashioned tools, baskets, and weapons. The village was the basic political structure for most Montagnard communities. Either elected by the adult village population or selected by the council of elders, a headman represented the village to the government, adjudicated disputes, and officiated at rituals. The village, however, was the least important social structure to the Rhade, who organized their society based on the family, the household, the group of kinsmen, and then the village. Gaining Rhade and Montagnard trust required outsiders to possess both sensitivity and willingness to observe and respect these cultural tenets.[2]

French missionaries established contact in the highlands in the 1920s, principally with the Rhade around Ban Me Thuot. The colonial administration considered the highlands a separate crown (Annamite) entity, not part of Vietnam. French policies towards highland peoples favored autonomy and recognition: education in their languages in schools was sanctioned

by the colonial administration. Montagnard elites from many indigenous communities constituted an inter-group elite that served as a fuse between outsiders and their peoples: they became educated by Western means, learnt French, perhaps even entered the colonial administration. During the First Indochina War both the French and the Viet Minh recruited among the hardy mountain people during the struggle for independence. Montagnards fought on both sides.[3]

A way of life under siege

After the Geneva Accords took effect, South Vietnam's regime began programs aimed at assimilation and agrarian development which challenged, among other things, the traditional Montagnard way of life. The Saigon government faced many problems attempting to construct a country from whole cloth. Diem's regime faced contentious minorities with little interest in acquiescence, without either the Viet Minh organization driving the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to the north or its imprimatur of anti-colonialism. The Saigon regime was also left with the moribund provincial-district administration where Vietnamese had traditionally hit a bamboo ceiling to advancement, another negative French legacy. Well-organized criminal, ethnic, and religious groups challenged and met defeat, in turn, at the hands of Diem's military and police. Refugees also challenged the ingenuity and resources of the struggling new South Vietnam. Tens of thousands of refugees, many of them Catholic and Diem's co-religionists, fled the communist north. The government of the south used these refugees as part of their program to develop and modernize the highland regions. This program included assimilating the mountain peoples.

Vietnamese lowland migrants and refugees also relocated into the Central Highlands at the government's behest from 1955 to 1957. Some 80,000 ethnic Vietnamese resettled in the plateaus and mountains of central South Vietnam. These pioneers set down among a shifting Montagnard population of over 455,000. Almost immediately, traditional land claims of highland peoples received scant attention by new Vietnamese district administrators. Frustration rankled from the change of crown domain-status in the Central Highlands during the colonial period and the subsequent loss of status evident from the South Vietnamese actions against minorities.[4]

Resettlement of migrants and refugees into the highlands put Montagnard communities under pressure. Some of these indigenous communities found themselves uprooted and relocated under the auspices of the South Vietnamese Land Development Program. Development centers supported the introduction of wet-land rice procedures and cultivation of cash-crops like cotton, rubber, and others. These actions held little appeal for many highlanders. The resettlement program also renamed villages and other places in the Vietnamese language. Montagnard courts, though not officially disbanded, saw their judges' salaries vanish. South Vietnamese officials shut

down schools which taught in highland languages and instruction in Montagnard languages was suspended. These actions further exacerbated tensions. Some of the handful of French-educated Rhade and other highland elites in Darlac province began to cultivate a nascent Montagnard-ethnonationalist sentiment.[5]

Ethnonationalism coalesced around the BAJARAKA movement in 1958, for some Montagnards. Formed from the letters in Bahnar, Jarai, Rhade, and Koho – the major ethnolinguistic Montagnard groups – BAJARAKA soon came to the attention of South Vietnam's security police. Letters requesting autonomous status for Montagnards from BAJARAKA leaders and other dissident activities led to arrests and repression. This first movement gave way to the Front Unifié de Lutte des Races Opprimées (United Struggle Front for the Oppressed Races), or FULRO, in conjunction with other dissident ethnic Cambodian minorities.[6] FULRO joined a growing number of opposition elements – at least in spirit – created by the conditions of governance in the South.

The Democratic Republic of Vietnam, or North Vietnam, decided at least as early as 1958 to help the struggle against the Diem regime in the South and its American allies. Diem regime policies, changing established rural patterns of land tenure and village-level governance, created a reservoir of discontent. Opposition efforts joined with armed and increasingly violent resistance in much of the South, often among dissident minority populations. By 1961, insurgents sought out remote villages throughout the Central Highlands for proselytization, recruiting, and, at times, terror.[7] Populated largely by non-Vietnamese Montagnards, the mountainous region of the Central Highlands was especially vulnerable because of several factors.

Vulnerability in the mountains

First, a sense of ethnonationalism grew among the mountain peoples after the division of Vietnam, strengthened by the pressures of Vietnamese in-migration.[8] The latest demonstration of the traditional enmity of the Vietnamese towards the Montagnards showed in their disregard for education and legal structures in and of highland languages. Special Forces Colonel George Morton observed in his end-of-command tour debriefing in 1963 that:

> The Montagnard who in most cases had been more friendly with the French than with their traditional lowland enemies, were wooed and often won by the Viet Cong. The subversion spread, and before long the communists controlled or influenced large portions of the population. The grievances were there and they were real. The VC merely took advantage of an existing situation.[9]

Ignoring the village-based foundations of both the larger Vietnamese and specific Montagnard societies, various Saigon government programs

aimed to regroup villages and hamlets, assimilate mountain tribes, and increase government access to resettled populations while hindering, in theory, insurgent access.[10] "Whether the peasants and Montagnards go with the VC out of conviction, fear or indifference is not the important point," Colonel Morton concluded: "The fact that they do, and that the government is not strong enough to prevent them from doing so, is important."[11]

Another problem came from insurgent efforts to take advantage of the Montagnard discontent engendered by those government efforts and traditional enmities. This last factor was part of a broader insurgent objective to target, isolate, and win over dissident minority populations. If persuasion failed, insurgents frequently resorted to terror, often executing teachers or village elders in gruesome public displays.

Montagnard vulnerability provided the men of US Army Special Forces with opportunities to employ unusual notions of how to bring about security and development. "Using an American version of Mao Tse Tung's 'Rules for Conduct,' " a commandant of the US Army Special Warfare Center would later write, "the Green Berets gained growing acceptance by normally suspicious and apathetic people living in remote jungle areas."[12]

The insurgents considered the highlands one of three critical strategic areas in the South. Vietnam's Central Highlands had several features that made them figuratively and literally key terrain. The government of the South held little sway, especially among the Montagnards. Few ethnic Vietnamese had settled there until recently. "Here the revolutionaries would construct," wrote historian William J. Duiker from captured North Vietnamese sources, "stable and firm base areas and build up the large-scale military units that would later advance to the heartland areas held by the enemy."[13] The remote region bordered on Cambodia and Laos, offering access to sanctuary and the potential of resupply. What was a strategic opportunity for the insurgents did not have to be a liability for the Saigon regime or its American advisors.

Like the Peace Corps with guns

The men of Special Forces then were quite different from their Regular Army counterparts. Army Regulation 614-62, which governed selection and assignment to Special Forces, codified the "triple volunteer" status: those selected must be volunteer soldiers, airborne-qualified, and capable and able to pass through Special Forces qualification. The regulations stated that such soldiers would train for and conduct operations in denied areas – "behind the lines" – and be able to work with foreign personnel.[14] Anywhere from forty-four to sixty-two weeks of formal training, depending on the military occupational skill, as well as demanding unit-level training, would also put an edge on this already select group of mostly noncommissioned officers.[15]

Men like Colonel Aaron Bank, an Office of Strategic Services veteran of World War Two, led this small outfit, which numbered only about 2,000 men in 1961.

Some men were expatriates of Eastern European countries who had escaped their homelands. These men often had both the acumen and ardor required to make it in Special Forces. These Lodge Act men – so-called because of the public law allowing their enlistment and service – were also important because of the original mission for Special Forces. In those early days of the Cold War, war planners intended for Special Forces teams to infiltrate eastern Europe to develop and help lead guerrilla uprisings in what would be the Soviet and Warsaw Pact rear areas. Men recruited under the Lodge Act were foreign-born and might never have lived in the United States and spoke Polish or Czech as natives. Some had much military experience gained in World War Two. Leaders like Colonel Bank – who had fought in the shadows in and since World War Two – encouraged individual initiative and imagination.[16]

The "A" detachment was the organizational building block of Special Forces. Comprised on paper of two officers and ten sergeants, the A detachment or team was the focus of training and operations. Team integrity was a core principle. Because of the requirement for improvisation and independence, skill cross-training and long, hard field exercises cemented the men into tight bands of military free thinkers. Each man had to become adept in communications, engineering, intelligence, medical, and martial skills. These men hungrily read Lenin and Mao and followed the conflicts in the Philippines, Algeria, and Cuba with a practiced eye.[17]

Guest speakers and lecturers like Dr. Bernard Fall – both a veteran and a scholar of the First Indochina War – and Brigadier General Edward Lansdale – with OSS and most recently advisory experience with the successful counterinsurgency efforts in the Philippines – appeared at the Special Warfare School often. Then-Colonel William P. Yarborough wrote that when school commandant he

> had placed *Street Without Joy* on the required reading list at the Special Warfare School. Bernard Fall appeared on the platform repeatedly where he defended his views on the developing Indo China situation especially on how it got into the mess it was then in.[18]

A reading list from the Special Warfare School of the period features articles by Lansdale, resistance fighters from World War Two, academics, and guerrillas.[19] Few Regular Army officers served with Special Forces then as the risks of association with a barely sanctioned elite unit were well known. What was there about the American Special Forces that enabled them to work among the Montagnards, putting aside their traditional enmities for the Vietnamese, and fight?

"Pin silver wings on my son's chest . . ."

The twelve-man operational detachment-A (ODA) on paper consisted of two officers and ten noncommissioned officers (NCOs), all airborne-qualified. A captain commanded the detachment and its executive officer was a first lieutenant. Doctrinal guidelines called for the team's NCOs to possess training in at least two of the team's four specialties: weapons, medicine, combat engineering, and communications. The team sergeant – the senior enlisted member – was a master sergeant, the second-highest enlisted rank in the army. He would be a company first sergeant or battalion operations sergeant in a conventional unit. Next in terms of degree of training and often in terms of experience was the operations and intelligence sergeant. He had normally received detailed instruction in a wide range of intelligence skills and tasks, including arranging and managing nets of clandestine agents and assets, interrogation, combat organization, and reconnaissance. Two NCOs each with the primary specialities made up the balance of the team, a senior and junior weapons sergeants, medics, engineers, and communicators.

Language capability and training, based on a ODA's area of operations, varied from native-capability (or the often year-long courses at the Defense Language Institute) to brief introductions by native speakers held in the team's classroom. Few Americans spoke Vietnamese in the late 1950s or early 1960s and training opportunities were scarce. This circumstance placed a premium on French speakers. Problems persisted despite the goal of getting all operational team members at least familiarized with their target languages.[20]

Operational detachments began intensive pre-deployment activities upon notification of a pending mission, ideally for three to six months. After setting aside time for language training, teams researched background and area studies materials, requested classified intelligence support (enemy order of battle information, status of friendly forces and target populations, etc.), and received support from the entire group staff. Detachments developed and executed tactical exercises as time permitted.[21]

All ODA members had matriculated through the Special Forces qualification course. Qualification course requirements varied by military occupational specialty, but ranged from 1,243 classroom hours and exercises for medical specialists, 1,329 for a weapons specialists, 1,385 for the engineers, to 1,560 for the radio operators. Detachment operations and intelligence (O&I) sergeants had additional training and skill requirements. Team or detachment sergeants had to have completed O&I courses in addition to cross-training in at least two Special Forces military occupational specialties as well before promotion.[22] The curriculum of the course varied over time, tweaked and tinkered with, but included cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural communications as well as ideological and political study in addition to commando-type tactical and operational training.

Prospective Special Forces officers attended several courses, linking up for some training and exercises with the NCOs. The Detachment Officer's course provided "selected officers and civilian personnel with a working knowledge in the latest doctrine and techniques of guerrilla war and special forces operations."[23] For eight weeks officers focused on all aspects of the Special Forces core skills of communications, demolitions and engineering, medicine, and operations and intelligence, as well as small unit operations and weapons familiarization. Each officer researched and wrote a detailed area study, often of a target country from the geographical area his Special Forces groups were oriented towards. Arduous, realistic field training exercises and parachute operations broke up the crush of classroom activities and an active physical training regimen.

Noncommissioned officers attended much of the same training as their prospective detachment commissioned officers. Sergeants, however, also attended comprehensive, subject-matter expertise training for each of their occupational specialties. The longest of these was for Special Forces medics, who attended a separate medical course for almost a year followed by a difficult practical laboratory course requiring battlefield-type surgery.

Officer candidates also attended the Special Warfare School's Counterinsurgency Operations course. This eight-week course examined the theories and doctrines of counterinsurgency and related subjects like civil affairs and intelligence operations. Case studies included Greece, Algeria, Malaya, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Candidates read Ernesto "Che" Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare*, Mao's *Selected Works,* and "special materials" provided by intelligence agencies and foreign liaison officers assigned to the Special Warfare School.[24]

Demanding unit-level training put an edge on an already select group of mostly senior noncommissioned officers once they graduated from the Special Warfare Center and received their assignments to one of the three Special Forces groups. All of Special Forces numbered fewer than 2,000 men by 1961. An example of more subjective criteria read that a Special Forces officer had to have "demonstrated that degree of maturity, tact, and diplomacy that would be indicative of his ability to influence and organize indigenous individuals and groups for the furtherance of the theater commander's objectives."[25] Peer pressure and the strenuous duty requirements weeded out those men, officer and enlisted, who could not gain acceptance into this military freemasonry.[26]

Special Forces soldiers could establish rapport with the Montagnards by sharing their austere lives in the highlands. Far from Saigon and its diversions, these Americans lived with and as the Montagnards, respecting their beliefs and practices as well as sharing their lot. Most Special Forces soldiers became members of the communities where they lived, after ceremonies marked by sacrifices of animals and copious quantities of rice spirits. Tall, white-skinned foreigners had left them their villages and helped them, with respect, in the not-so-distant past.

Continuities I: small war in the highlands

The French had extensive dealings with the highland minorities during their colonial period and the First Indochina War. Colonial administrators had allowed the Montagnards relative autonomy. French leaders recruited and mobilized restive highlanders to fight the Viet Minh in the First Indochina War. Details are sparse. The RAND Corporation translated France's *Lessons of the War in Indochina* in 1967 and few copies appear to exist.[27] In a short chapter devoted to "Irregular Forces," the report discussed the campaign in which French small-unit leaders raised indigenous units in the highlands of central Indochina, including Laos and Cambodia as well as Vietnam. "The only element that could serve our cause," this report presented, "was the racial enmity that the Montagnard people and certain ethnic minorities had for the Vietnamese of the delta and the coasts."[28] Irregular units comprised of highlanders led by French subalterns forced the Viet Minh to divert combat power to counter this threat and deal with the erosion of security in their own rear areas.[29]

Between 1950 and 1954, some 15,000 irregulars came to fight under French colors, led by a small number of volunteers. The population of highlanders and ethnic minorities comprised almost 20 percent of Indochina.[30] These irregular unit leaders were noncommissioned officers and company-grade officers, a part of the Mixed Airborne Commando Group (GCMA) and by 1951 the Mixed Intervention Group (GMI). The French established a school for instruction in guerrilla warfare for its leaders and indigenous cadres.

Bernard B. Fall wrote, in the introduction to Roger Trinquier's *Modern Warfare: a French View of Counterinsurgency*, "De Lattre [the French theater commander-in-chief for much of the First Indochina War] had decided to turn the Viet Minh's skill in fighting behind the lines against the Viet Minh itself by implanting anti-Communist guerrillas deep inside the enemy's territory."[31] These formations had their conceptual basis in the *maquis* and resistance groups of World War Two as well as the deep penetration raiders of the China–Burma–India theater, Orde Wingate's Chindits and Frank Merrill's Marauders.[32] "By the end of 1953," Fall observed, "some GCMA operations began to assume strategic importance."[33] Fall referred to regimental-sized raids deep in the Viet Minh staging areas in northern Vietnam as well as efforts to relieve the besieged elements at Dien Bien Phu. Fall also wrote that the "*Bataillons Montagnards* of the French colonial forces were renowned for their endurance and combativity."[34] With long traditions of hunting and independence, Montagnards quickly took to campaigning, especially against Vietnamese.

Other observers in the early 1960s wrote about "revolutionary war," seeing – as Colonel Trinquier's *Modern Warfare* discussed in depth – that the French had built a conceptual bridge between their experiences in Indochina and the challenges facing them in Algeria. Civilian support,

psychological weapons, political indoctrination, mobilization and protection of minority or marginal populations at society's edge were elements of this style of conflict that build on an analysis of the French experiences.[35] Fall also noted that by early 1951 "Trinquier's methods [applied live-fire in Indochina] became known to the American military advisors in Saigon, and Trinquier was invited to visit American anti-guerrilla training centers in Korea and Japan."[36] Assimilating the factors that led to success among the Montagnards, Trinquier's writing and teaching reflect organizational adaptation and learning for which the French specifically or the military in general seldom receive credit.

Counter-revolution

The French army rapidly conducted a grueling internal and external analysis of France's defeat in its Indochina War. A doctrine of *guerre revolutionnaire*, derived from studying Viet Minh strengths and French shortcomings in the Indochina War, found application in Algeria and briefly in metropolitan France. This doctrine "joined with a sense of dissatisfaction many felt with the social and political realities of contemporary France. It was this combination, at first only vaguely apparent, that was to give the doctrine its far-reaching impetus."[37] "The strongest feature of the French analysis," Paret wrote, "undoubtedly rests in its comprehension that the intermingling of military and political factors in revolutionary movements constitutes not a mark of primitiveness and lack of development, but a source of power."[38]

The French doctrine of counter-revolution held that enemy forces were primary targets and that friendly lines of communications and the population needed protection. A mix of military and civilian paramilitary resources had to accomplish protection as well as civic action and psychological warfare to gain and maintain popular support against the insurgents. Security forces might resettle elements of the population to facilitate their security. Particular attention should focus on trying to reclaim captured insurgents through indoctrination and reeducation. Again, Paret found that supporting this doctrine "waxing and waning on both sides must be powerful ideological and moral forces that bind separate techniques into dynamic strategy." Reform on the part of political authorities was tactical in nature – obscured by the problems with maintaining colonialism in Algeria – and negotiation with the insurgents impossible because the war in Algeria was part of an ideological, total war against communism.[39]

Counter-revolution had two stages in theory: destruction and construction. Destruction meant uncovering and destroying the political and military infrastructure of the insurgents. Priority went to countering the political, administrative underground element. Based on intelligence and mobile operations, the military would run to ground armed insurgent bands and root out the clandestine support and auxiliary. Construction was the purview of civic action and psychological operations as well as resettlement initiatives.

To the extent political and economic reforms occurred, they were part of the construction stage. Also part of this stage was the introduction of self-defense initiatives both in resettled communities and in those communities left in place. Humanitarian civic action like medical clinics served to engender positive regard for construction actions and themes as well as to create access to reticent rural or remote populations.[40] There was also an awareness of the French history of colonial warfare throughout Africa as well as in Indochina.[41]

The French flexibly applied this doctrine with vigor in Algeria from 1954 until 1960. Commanders and civilian authorities used paramilitary forces and auxiliaries to augment mobile forces as well as to help secure communities. Vulnerable populations found themselves moved wholesale to camps for security and indoctrination. Adaptive civil–military arrangements reflected the balance needed to develop and execute operations tailored to specific indigenous communities and tactical circumstances. There was a limit to the success possible, where "the process of pacification – whether purely repressive or more political and psychological in nature – seemed to come up against an impassable barrier."[42] A dearth of policy solutions combined with the contradictions of colonialism made this barrier overwhelming. As a new French president granted Algerian independence, restive and resentful soldiers took the new doctrine and a brief, violent war home to France.

Potential cues from the French war in Indochina, according to one of the many myths of the Second Indochina War, went unheeded by the Americans. This myth was only partially true. Awareness of the French war was not uncommon, especially in the upper echelons of the Kennedy administration. American attention recognized several French innovations, not the least of which was the application of helicopters and other aviation assets. A number of articles appeared in US Army and other journals in the early 1960s. A sampling of these pieces reflects a pragmatic discourse that touched on tactics and operations as well as on supporting techniques and principles, and strategic considerations, particularly of the affairs of Indochina.[43] The war in Algeria was news, not history, as Americans and the South Vietnamese attempted to deal with their security challenges.

The Korean War had provided a ready template for American action in South Vietnam after Geneva. Advisory efforts organized, equipped, and trained the ARVN to resist a cross-border invasion. If "lessons learned" from the Korean War provided a template for US assistance to the ARVN, there were also examples of successful counterinsurgency advisory support like that in the Philippines that could have provided a template.[44]

Continuities II: a small war in the Philippines

The United States had provided low-key, limited support to the fledgling democratic Philippines during its almost decades-long small war against

the communist Hukbalahap or Huk insurgents. Wracked and wrecked by the long campaigns, guerrilla and otherwise, during the war against the Japanese, the Philippines struggled with new democratic institutions against a history of corruption and oppression as well as an undeveloped agrarian economy rife with inequities. These struggles took place in the shadow of some fifty years of colonial rule by the United States that followed centuries of such exploitation by Spain. Disaffected communist parties and their military wings had developed cohesion, structure, and leadership during the long campaign against the Japanese occupation. The United States supported the indigenous Philippine government in its successful fight to develop and reform as it fended off a strong, initially successful insurgent challenge. These advisory and support efforts attracted the attention of analysts. Victory over the Huks came "from the ever increasing number of Filipinos dedicated to making their democracy live."[45]

Contexts: conflict and corruption

The Huks drew on a lengthy period of overt and covert opposition to conditions of inequity and injustice, in a colonial setting. Literally taking to the hills to oppose Japanese occupation in December 1941, the recently consolidated communist organizations formed the *Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon* or Hukbalahaps, the "Anti-Japanese Army."[46] Organizing and fighting the Japanese, like the Vietnamese and Chinese insurgencies, provided a strenuous school in doing much with little while at the same time providing necessary credentialing as both nationalists and reformers. The Huks had enjoyed some success during the war against the Japanese occupiers, liberating areas of central Luzon and establishing and administering free zones. Resistance to indigenous, democratic government continued into the 1950s. Newfound independence from the United States provided conditions of near chaos for the Huks politically then militarily to oppose the new, indigenous government. The nascent democracy found itself suddenly responsible for centuries of corruption and inequality while trying to extemporize the institutions of democratic government and security.[47]

The fledgling Philippine democracy suffered badly at the hands of the Huks from 1946 until 1950. Basing its strategy on successful models from resistance to the occupation, the Huks established a popular front as well as a shadow government outside Manila, first on Luzon, organizing in camps and villages far from effective government control. Huk leaders and cadres link simple themes of land and political reform with denunciation of American imperialism: "Land for the Landless" and "Bullets Not Ballots." This organization, which provided

> political indoctrination, coupled with "iron discipline", turned a movement which had started out with an old-time Robin Hood and Agrarian

> Socialist flavor into a tough, ruthless force that had hope and intent – by mid-1950 – of winning the Philippines by 1952.[48]

Huk strengths also fed on government weaknesses demonstrated in the 1949 elections. This last abortive exercise in democracy was "fraught with fraud, terror, and rampant electioneering violations."[49] By 1948 the second president, Elpido Quirino,

> grasped the basic point that eluded leaders in other countries faced with similar threats: the system would have to be reformed in the critical areas of government that bore on the insurgency despite the possible risks of such a course to the administration.[50]

Initial Philippine counterinsurgent responses targeted the Huks as criminals, bringing insufficient resources to bear. The armed forces of the Philippines, comprised of the wartime remnants of both the military and the police forces, were inept and poorly disciplined. A constabulary, responsible to the provincial governors, as well as a regular army, navy, and air force poorly coped with the Huk insurgents. Rarely sortieing far from their barracks, these government forces "seldom succeeded in anything but alienating the local villagers who felt the brunt of the troops' frustrations." Some private paramilitary units also tried to keep the insurgents from targeting plantations and their owners. Success in most of these endeavors was limited.

Adaptation

President Quirino began a series of military reforms to better organize the Philippine constabulary and army into a force capable of dealing with the range of challenges that Huk resistance offered. Battalion combat teams of combined infantry–artillery engineers and support elements emerged from these reforms. These teams were light formations with good mobility in the remote areas with few roads. Specialist elements provided additional capabilities, especially five-man teams of Scout Rangers, to develop tactical intelligence on the activities and whereabouts of Huk guerrilla bands. Government battalion teams had defined geographical areas of responsibility with the authority to organize and reorganize the police and paramilitary resources of these areas to match operational requirements. Despite the succinct nature of a paragraph-length summation of Philippine counterinsurgency responses, the process of arriving at them came about through "trial and error and repeated failure of more conventional approaches." This learning process took several years. Stationing small units without a maneuver capability and the emerging efficacy of light infantry units informed by tactical intelligence provided by Scout Rangers emerged as positive lessons.[51]

One of these exceptions was the specially-recruited and trained "Force X," led by Colonel Napoleon Valeriano, Philippine Army. This small force of forty-seven officers and men operated from a remote mission support site, and were trained and equipped to operate as insurgents against the Huks. In several engagements Force X successfully infiltrated Huk bands to kill and capture insurgents. The reputation of this small, select force was almost the only success.[52] "Most of the lessons we learned," according to Edward G. Lansdale, then a lieutenant colonel, "we learned the hard way. We made mistakes, but kept on trying until we found something that would work."[53]

The conventionally trained Philippine Army – advised by a small Joint US Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG) – were ineffective in their operations against Huk insurgents. Operations by the poorly paid and trained troops received little effective support. As a consequence units "were forced to live off the land, or rather, to live off the villagers. Enlisted men lacked discipline while their officers, often engaged in large-scale corruption themselves, did little to correct the situation." Operations suffered from poor operational security, compromising missions. Hostility existed between soldiers and citizens, exacerbated by poor knowledge of local conditions in either a tactical sense or of the problems of local populations in a land rife with economic problems and in need of serious reforms.[54] The catalyst for the learning that Lansdale spoke about was leadership.

Catalyst for change

The sanguine learning process playing out in remote areas of the Philippines produced critics of the government. Ramon Magsaysay, one of these critics and a former resistance leader himself, became President Quirino's Secretary of National Defense. The son of a school teacher and carpenter, Magsaysay worked and put himself through school before the outbreak of World War Two and the Japanese invasion of the Philippines. He fought the Japanese well as both a soldier and a guerrilla. After the war Magsaysay went through several years in the rough and tumble of Manila's local politics. He formed an appreciation and sympathy for the plight of the people both in the rural provinces and the capital's neighborhoods. Citizens so recently affected by war and occupation often found themselves victimized by the venality and corruption of political officials. Magsaysay well "understood the connections between popular grievances and the support gathered by the insurgency." Magsaysay also possessed honesty and great energy. His leadership was the critical catalyst for the counterinsurgency success that followed in the mid-1950s.[55]

Frequent, personal inspections of military outposts across the country brought an awareness in the minds of officials, soldiers, and citizens that success and change were possible when they saw Magsaysay. He encouraged innovations like the creation of the Civil Affairs Office. The Civil Affairs

Office balanced rumor control, public information, psychological operations and civic action, active at all echelons of the war, from battalion level to the office of the Secretary of National Defense. Other adaptations grew out of an expansive definition of defense responsibilities including responsiveness to civilian grievances, judicial reform, construction projects for schoolhouses and health clinics.

Magsaysay's ultimate and most successful adaptation involved the creation of a program to recruit and convert Huk guerrillas and sympathizers. The Economic Development Corps provided land and micro-financing for village-level resettlement projects on public land. Psychological operations targeted rural Huk bands and played on the appeal of land ownership, peace, and targeted assistance to lure insurgents out of the conflict.[56] Then Lieutenant Colonel Edward G. Lansdale, Magsaysay's principal ally with the JUSMAG, recalled that these programs proved "that some of the most significant help came, not from the US, but when Filipinos started helping themselves."[57]

Electoral reform – also brought about by Magsaysay's deft political handling – took away another critical insurgent grievance. These reforms and the formation of an independent commission to oversee elections, taking balloting out of the hands of corrupt politicos, engaged public support and by 1953 gave Magsaysay the presidency. In 1954 the most influential Huk leader, Luis Taruc, surrendered, as the new president continued to pursue reform and the counterinsurgency hand in hand. President Magsaysay had won his war with the insurgents by the time of his death in an airplane crash in March 1957.[58]

Critical analysis

Douglas Blaufarb isolated several key elements of success in the Philippine counterinsurgency in his succinct *The Counterinsurgency Era: US Doctrine and Performance 1950 to the Present*. First, political objectives were primary in guiding all military considerations as an understanding of reforms took hold. "Military operations," Blaufarb wrote, "were subordinated to the goal of attracting the support of the people." This meant relying on the tactical efficacy of light infantry guided by good intelligence, eschewing the firepower of artillery and air support with its inevitable collateral damage. Second, intelligence improved as the people began to appreciate that the military and government officials could and did become efficient and honest. Finally, tactical efficiency and governmental honesty interlocked with civic action in an increasingly more effective manner as Magsaysay combined programs of assistance. His personal involvement and leadership provided the catalyst for change with regard to inter-agency operations as it had with his initial military reforms.[59]

Lansdale, by then a brigadier general, reflected on the campaigns against the Huks to interested, professional audiences in the United States after a

tour in South Vietnam that followed his assignments in the Philippines. One opportunity was a "Counter-Guerrilla Seminar" at the US Army's Special Warfare Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, on June 15 1961. "We made mistakes," Lansdale said, "but kept on trying until we found something that would work. Then, because some of the lessons were highly unorthodox, we had to fight off interference from more conventional people for the right to apply these lessons that win."[60] "The Philippine defense forces," Lansdale said, "took the initiative to construct a true political base for their fight. They shunned the temptations of a coup, which would have brought chaos to a literate, idealistic people by further destroying the legality of the Constitution."[61]

American involvement in support of Philippine counterinsurgency was limited throughout the war with the Huks. The key elements of the successful counterinsurgency were Magsaysay's, not Lansdale's. Lansdale did play an important role in helping shape such adaptations as the application of psychological operations (Lansdale's specialty) and the creation and development of the Civil Affairs Office, as well as the Economic Development Corps.

Magsaysay intended that the Economic Development Corps project would give Philippine citizens – beginning with repatriated Huk guerrillas – a stake in the success of Philippine democracy. In a country of tenant farmers with little hope of land ownership, this project took a forty-acres-and-a-mule approach, providing land, small loans, infrastructure improvements like medical clinics, schools, roads, and even limited access to electricity to settlers drawn first from former Huk guerrillas and their families. These families signed a contract with the government to farm their land and repay government loans. The first settlements, on Mindinao, were very successful: "Applicants soon outnumbered available plots and many Luzon peasants paid their own way to Mindinao in attempts to get some land adjacent to the EDCOR sites." More sites in the project began there, with two more started on Luzon by 1954. This program provided Magsaysay and the government with a very real victory, not only in terms of effective reform but in psychological warfare terms as well.[62]

Lansdale and Magsaysay had a close relationship and shared personal attributes of straightforwardness and informality. Lansdale had access to US support for Magsaysay's programs that probably included CIA funds. That said, American support and Lansdale's role were subordinate to the strong leadership and flexibility of Magsaysay and his programs.[63] Lansdale concluded it took eight years of a "real combat phase" for the Huks to conclude that armed insurgency was futile. At their peak, Huk combatants may have numbered 15,000, claiming a million supporters out of a Philippine population of 17–20 million. The armed forces of the Philippines may have numbered 50,000. With this poor force ratio, innovation involved accepting the broader parameters of counterinsurgency. Innovation also meant survival.[64]

The principles present in the Philippine innovation were leadership, good combat intelligence, aggressive patrolling, and psychological warfare coupled with civic action. Magsaysay was everywhere. He spurred on troops and challenged their leaders. Magsaysay listened to peasants and closely examined the actions of subordinate leaders to ensure that the Huks and not the civilian population were the targets of operations. The Secretary of National Defense's incessant travel provided him with first-hand data and information about the defense forces, its enemy, and the state of mind of the Philippine people across the country. Lansdale wrote for a Defense Department advisory on counterinsurgency:

> he [Magsaysay] went from the combat areas to his office, to Cabinet meetings, to Congressional hearings, to staff councils, he commenced to think and speak and decide with more sureness, with the authority of someone who knows whereof he speaks, of someone who has been there.[65]

Success followed innovation. There were honest elections in 1951 and 1953. Magsaysay, putting off officers who wanted a coup to put him in power, resigned from his post with the government to run. Magsaysay won the presidency by a landslide. As president, Magsaysay governed and led as he had as the defense secretary, traveling incessantly and constantly querying the Philippine people, troops, and officials. His death in the crash of his C-47 on 17 March 1957 occurred during one of his trips.[66]

Magsaysay developed a knowledge-based solution to the challenges of the Huk insurgency. Data and information gained first-hand provided him with the leverage to challenge lazy commanders or corrupt administrators with facts and implement action. These decisions came either from what corrective actions might work or by asking what would benefit the Philippine citizen or soldier and putting the spur to the person responsible. Lansdale felt that "lessons learned" from the Philippines could apply elsewhere, including South Vietnam:

> No matter in what portion of the world you choose the countries for comparison, the pattern is substantially the same everywhere. Many of you here today [a counter-guerrilla seminar at the US Army Special Warfare Center] face, or possibly will face, the problems which were substantially solved in the Philippines and which today are critical in such countries as South Vietnam and Laos.[67]

Combatants and continuities

The Rhade, then other Montagnard communities, accepted arms, assistance, and training from the Americans beginning in November 1961. Despite the veneer of combined operations, it appears that not only were the fundamentals of small arms use and small unit operations translated

from English into Montagnard dialects, but also the direct involvement of the American Special Forces. In what increasingly became a relationship between the Vietnamese and the Montagnards, these Special Forces soldiers readily adapted their Cold War skill sets formed to raise and maintain resistance forces to reach out to the Montagnards. Personal bonds and links between these soldiers who respected and shared life in the Central Highlands not only won the trust of the Montagnards, but were consistent with the positive aspects of dealings with the French. Vulnerabilities in the Central Highlands among highland communities created opportunities for insurgents and counterinsurgents alike. US Army Special Forces took these vulnerabilities-turned-opportunities and transformed them into the first, successful counterinsurgency program in the Second Indochina War. This transformation took place while much of the rest of the American military struggled with definitions.

There were significant historical precedents and precursors for successful adaptation. French efforts with mobile guerrilla forces and Montagnards enjoyed at least tactical success. The French employed these measures in small packets relatively late in the First Indochina War. GCMA/GMI elements set off on mountain trails, as feeble attempts began to raise and employ Vietnamese forces of the French Union, too late to have much effect. Then contemporary American counterinsurgency efforts – though not known as such – in the Philippines provided an effective, minimalist model known in many parts of the US Army and the Departments of State and Defense. Many key figures knew Lansdale in both the Eisenhower and the Kennedy administrations. The voluble air force officer presented potential techniques and principles from the Philippine campaigns against the Huks in lessons and lectures based on hands-on experience. Lansdale also made an impression on popular culture both in print and in movies.

Adaptation in the face of similar tactical and operational requirements – in the same terrain and involving the same target populations – also reflected organizational learning. There was a complex interaction between the security context of the insurgency (aggression by the Viet Cong and flight or resistance by the Montagnards, inaction on the part of the South Vietnamese) and the strategic requirement to do something in the Central Highlands to protect vulnerable populations. This interaction created an opportunity that Colonel Gilbert Layton recognized for the MAAG and the Saigon regime. He passed this opportunity to Special Forces soldiers. The Combined Studies Division in J3 (operations directorate) of the MAAG had access to Special Forces teams with the confidence that their unique capabilities included training to improvise and overcome in an operational milieu of resistance and mobilization.

Similar challenges can call up similar responses: a challenging, mountainous operational milieu; a hardy, indigenous population, ill-disposed towards ethnic Vietnamese; and a small pool of military manpower with backgrounds in or predilections for resistance and irregular warfare. The

American Special Forces teams on temporary duty in South Vietnam, working for Colonel Layton, got the Village Defense Program started from its experimental beginnings with the Rhade in the village of Buon Enao.

French and American advisors led from the front at the tactical and operational levels in their respective efforts among the Montagnards. Foreign leadership might drive a wedge, though, between the highlanders and the South Vietnamese, however effective the mobilization of village defenders or strike forces. Initially, the role of the ARVN in mobilizing and training the Montagnards was small, limited to speakers of Montagnard languages. At the political level the catalyst of bold, courageous leadership was even more important. Magsaysay's personal involvement and incredible energy helped him motivate soldiers and politicians at all levels to make the army in service of a democratic government and ideals truly an instrument of effective change. Magsaysay's example contrasted with that of his predecessors – and successors – in Philippine government.

During the First Indochina War, Vietnamese leadership scarcely mattered, subsumed in the colonialism and implicit racism of French rule. French counter-revolutionary doctrine and operations based on their lessons-learned analysis from the First Indochina War missed or ignored the corrosive nature of this racialism. There were no analogues in either Diem or his regime to provide a leadership catalyst for either direction or reform at the beginning of the Second Indochina War. Senior American leadership, political and military, were generally familiar with these continuities. Lansdale and Bernard Fall lectured all around Washington, DC as well as in more narrow professional venues like the Special Warfare Center. President Kennedy had visited Vietnam as a senator.

Laos loomed large as a potential crisis inherited from the Eisenhower administration. Since the end of World War Two, numerous military operations, many charged with political overtones, had challenged the United States: support for Greece, breaking the Berlin blockade, mobilizing for the Korean War as well as the anticipated defense of Europe, assistance to the French in Southeast Asia, squelching the Suez crisis, and military landings in Lebanon, all in addition to the minimalist support for the fledgling free Philippines. Despite strong traditions of frontier constabulary missions and imperial policing, the US Army was in doctrinal and intellectual disarray as President Kennedy assumed office.

3 Contexts, doctrines, and discontinuities

General Taylor's recommendations in the wake of his October 1961 visit to South Vietnam insisted that American military force was the critical catalyst for successful resistance to the insurgency. The Hilsman position almost diametrically opposed Taylor's thesis, locating the fulcrum of success at rice-roots levels, the lever pushing local security forces. Mobilization efforts among the Montagnards, begun at that same time by serendipity, support the latter thesis. Historical and cultural contexts shaped American doctrine and predilections. Despite a long history of fighting American Indians, policing the frontier, and serving as imperial infantry, the US Army was not ready intellectually, or equipped with doctrine, to train or advise the ARVN to fight insurgents. The tumultuous history of the US Army in the 1950s and early 1960s further confused efforts to recognize contemporary battlefield challenges posed by insurgents around the world. The cumulative weight of these contexts, doctrine, and discontinuities, coupled with the outcomes of other measures like the Strategic Hamlet Program and the advisory efforts, led to erosion of Special Forces' successes, at least in the war against the insurgents. Continuities existed that Special Forces soldiers and Montagnards exploited for mutual benefit, beginning in 1961. Despite its long history with small wars, the larger US Army shaped its doctrine and practice in accordance with more contemporary events and cultural biases. Army efforts took place in a contested intellectual and institutional space, further complicating debates and decisions. Memories of small wars' lessons would go unheeded as vociferous inter-service rivalries raged.

Contexts

Historical contexts

The US Army responded to the mission to advise, equip, and train the ARVN by holding up a mirror. This mirror reflected the recent experience of the Korean War and the larger images of the US Army. As a result of these images, the ARVN prepared to repel an invasion from the communist North. A mix of American doctrine and culture – coupled with the shortage

of leaders, big-unit orientation, and endemic corruption – shaped what the ARVN could do and not do by 1963. Linking military history with institutional, political, and technological dynamics, doctrine also "is the bridge between thought and action."[1] At best, doctrine shapes how military organizations think, at worst doctrine can become dogma.[2]

There is also a high-order doctrinal paradox: why was the US Army, having spent the preponderance of its history involved "not on the conventional battlefield, but in the performance of myriad operations other than war," without doctrine and understanding of how to wage such small wars?[3] Examples of low-intensity operations include the century of intermittent strife on the American frontier with Native Americans, post-Civil War reconstruction of the former Confederate states, the Philippine insurrection, the Vera Cruz expedition and the punitive expedition, as well as two reformist occupations, in 1898–1902 and 1906–1909, of Cuba. World Wars One and Two swept away the army's collective experience in frontier and imperial policing. The process of attempting to digest the lessons and divine the future of warfare from the sharp, intense struggles of the American Expeditionary Force and accompanying national mobilization efforts consumed the intellectual energies of the army until the parsimony of the interwar years focused attention on careers and survival.

The US Army borrowed "small wars" as a shorthand for counterinsurgency and other operations short of conventional war from British soldier–author Sir Charles E. Callwell. Despite a rudimentary system for promulgating doctrine during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an "informal" system did exist, "comprised of custom, tradition, and accumulated experience that was transmitted from one generation of soldiers to the next through a combination of official and unofficial writings, curricular materials, conversation, and individual's memories."[4]

Before World War Two, the US Army generally waged its small wars well, "flexible enough to adapt to the many challenges of the small wars environment, despite the relative paucity of formal, written doctrine for these operations." Less successful, though, were the related experiments in civic action or pacification: "Changing values, however, was not an easy task. Values could not be changed by bayonets, as the nation quickly learned during Reconstruction. Nor could they be imposed quickly, as dabblers in the Indian, Cuban, and Moro questions well knew."[5]

Themes arose from these campaigns. Operational and tactical flexibility, the exercise of discretion, led to experimentation and adaptation on the frontier, in the Philippines, and in Cuba. The US Army selected small groups of men to raise, and often led indigenous forces, "scouts," as paramilitary adjuncts to American troops. US attempts through its soldiers to transplant foreign institutions or values provoked strong resistance. A difference existed as well between the skills and training required above the small-unit level for war fighting and those of the soldier/diplomat/civil

engineer that seemed best to fit the expeditions abroad in the Philippines or Cuba.

The US Army found itself thrust into both World War Two and the Korean War, shaken from institutional lethargy. Despite initial efforts to study and learn from its World War One experiences, the army did little with any putative lessons as congressional parsimony forced personnel cuts and precluded most acquisition activities until World War Two loomed large.[6] A similar pattern followed, though much faster, after 1945. Inter-service rivalries that survived World War Two grew in complexity and enmity with the emergence of a separate air force to enter the fight for defense resources. After the Korean War, the roles envisioned for and by the US Army were much in play. Coupled with public, often acrimonious inter-service conflict over budgets and missions, this uncertainty added another element to the near-chaotic mix of doctrinal influences. Awareness of security challenges focused on Europe and the challenge of a vibrant, hostile Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact armed and arrayed just across the hardening inter-German border. The security solution was for the US to counter threats with "massive retaliation" using nuclear weapons promulgated in October 1953 with NSC 162/2 as "New Look."[7]

Cultural and organizational contexts

Struggles raged over the role of army ground forces in the wake of the army's nuclear battlefield-oriented experimentation with concepts and force structure in the late 1950s. "Perhaps the most difficult obstacle facing the Army as it attempted to prepare for counterinsurgency operations," reads a US Army history of doctrinal evolution, "was the mental redirection and re-education required of its officers and soldiers, most of whom had only been exposed to nuclear or conventional tactical doctrine."[8] The surprises and stress of the Korean War – battlefield reverses, human wave attacks, the rigors of the environment, and the fear of Soviet aggression in Europe – gave way to the shocks of President Dwight Eisenhower's defense policies and budget cuts, and their effects on the US Army.

Army leaders came from the combat arms branches and had achieved rank and respect waging the campaigns, generally in Europe, that helped defeat Nazi Germany. There were no officers in the upper echelons of the army that had experience in the Office of Strategic Services with paramilitary forces or resistance activities. Senior leaders thought of such small war activities as adjuncts to the principal army missions of defeating enemy armies through firepower and maneuver.

A reliance on the overwhelming power of nuclear weapons put the army into a supporting role as "Massive Retaliation" favored the US Air Force and Navy with budgets and influence. By 1959, army end strength "was only three-quarters of its 1955 strength, and less than two-thirds of its strength in 1954, while some Korean War units were still demobilizing."[9]

General Matthew Ridgway would retire and his successor General Maxwell Taylor would serve and both chafed at the parsimonious strictures of budget authorizations. Both of these men, hardly friends, were from the airborne divisions – called a "mafia" by some – and believed in the army as the nation's decisive ground combat element.

New Look

After the inconclusive struggle in Korea and seemingly pointless support of the French in Indochina, the principal role of America's military policy became "not to win World War III nor to waste American strength in bloody sideshows like Korea but to deter Soviet aggression and avoid war altogether." With the promulgation of National Security Council memorandum NSC 149/2 in April 1953, "Basic National Security Policies and Programs in Relation to Their Costs," protecting a strong US economy became paramount to security. The "New Look" military policy, from NSC 162/2, developed to facilitate the required balance between defense requirements and economy.[10] This balance created enormous tension in the contentious environment of Washington, DC, where budgets and their various constituencies determine manpower and equipment for the armed services. Manpower and equipment affected what was possible and at what level of risk. From the end of World War Two, bitter administrative and bureaucratic struggles had become the norm over roles, missions, budgets, and manning levels. For the US Army, budget and manpower cuts followed a particularly heated and relatively public debate between General Matthew Ridgway and the Eisenhower administration.[11]

New Look relied on nuclear weapons for deterrence. This reliance privileged the air force and navy with their relative lock on these weapons and delivery systems. "The New Look redefined the role of each Service," wrote analyst Andrew Bacevich, "aligning it with the requirements of an atomic age."[12] The US Army found itself dazed and confused in the aftermath of the internecine battles, buffeted by force cuts and the attendant influence on capabilities.[13] Army Chief of Staff, Matthew B. Ridgway, also influenced doctrine with a revision of the *Field Service Regulations* released as Field Manual 100-5 in 1954. This version dealt with some understanding of the Korean War and an acknowledgment of the requirement to adapt to nuclear weapons on the battlefield.[14] Ridgway retired in 1955, amid a continuing swirl of controversy about New Look, leadership within America's defense establishment, and the proper role of the army.

General Maxwell D. Taylor was Ridgway's successor, but during his tenure the army experienced many of the same pressures and uncertainties. General Taylor argued in much the same vein as Ridgway had that the nation needed a versatile army, capable of dealing with a range of threats.[15] Ultimately "flexible response" would be the label that Taylor would apply to US Army actions and programs designed to maintain relevance.[16]

"The army declined," political scientist Richard Betts has observed,

> from approximately a million men in 1954 to 870,000 in 1959. Dienbienphu, Quemoy and Matsu, and difficulties in the Lebanon operation showed the weakness of United States capabilities for limited intervention, and field exercises in 1958 and 1960 showed weaknesses in NATO forces.[17]

Policy decisions about the respective roles of nuclear weapons, delivery systems, and their potential use drove resource allocation decisions that, in turn, drove force structure decisions. Congress played a role as one arbiter of resources and a forum for dissenting military opinions, at times for partisan advantage.[18]

The army did try to take the initiative against "massive retaliation." This initiative consisted of attempts to continue several weapons and other technology-based programs. Programs for missiles, both air defense and strike, and nuclear-capable artillery at all echelons as well as battlefield aviation, all attempted to build on developmental efforts begun since the end of World War Two. These initiatives had programmatic lives of their own based on the contingent interaction between applied technology and the budget process. Monies chased programs and platforms with little relation to some larger vision of future battlefields.[19]

Some of the US Army's "best and brightest"

Lieutenant General James Gavin was one of the army's most eloquent spokesmen on behalf of technology and battlefield mobility. In *War and Peace in the Space Age* Gavin analyzed the strategic environment of "limited war" that arose after World War Two. He wrote:

> Limited war is not a matter of time. It is limited in the objectives sought, the means employed and, usually, the area in which it is fought. Limited war may go on for many years, as Mao demonstrated in China. Furthermore, there may be several limited wars all going on at the same time. In fact this is the most probable nature of future war: a slow, almost imperceptible transition of a bad economic and political situation into internal disorder.[20]

As perceptive as these comments were, Gavin saw a monolithic communism, undifferentiated between countries and divorced from nationalism. Gavin had come to the Pentagon in 1954 from an assignment in Europe as the US Army's VII Corps commander. This senior command experience helped shape his appreciation for battlefield mobility in a potential war with the numerically superior forces of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Gavin was also an early advocate of space-based satellites and missilry. The

austerity in New Look budgets jeopardized these programs in addition to reducing manpower.[21]

Assumptions about a potential battlefield dominated by atomic or nuclear weapons brought about two tentative organizational responses. General Taylor discarded the army's traditional divisional structure in favor of "pentomic" divisions composed of battle groups rather than regiments. A strategic – rapidly employable – army corps became a worldwide reserve built around the capabilities of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions and a corps headquarters. All of these elements maintained high levels of combat readiness to facilitate rapid employment. These organizational adaptations, however, could not mask the decrement in the US Army's combat power that a concurrent reduction in fighting strength of one division and eight regimental combat teams brought about. The turbulence of division reorganization may have further decreased combat readiness. The pentomic organization was short-lived.[22]

General Maxwell Taylor, as soon as he retired in 1959, published *The Uncertain Trumpet*. This book detailed a strategy of "Flexible Response" (capitalized by Taylor) characterized as "the need for a capability to react across the entire spectrum of possible challenge, for coping with anything from general atomic war to infiltration and aggressions such as threaten Laos and Berlin in 1959." Limited war – the indistinct range of conflicts between peace and general war – required deterrence, or winning if not avoided, lest limited war lead to general war.[23] Taylor criticized New Look as both indecisive and ineffective, cheaply mortgaging future capabilities to pay mostly for nuclear capabilities to support "Massive Retaliation."[24] Like Gavin, Taylor viewed communism as monolithic.

Taylor's proposed changes primarily focused on war fighting. His "quick fixes" called for better planning and training for limited wars, emphasis on ballistic missiles, air defense of Strategic Air Command capabilities, and civil defense. At least the first three of these proposals favored the army with regard to force structure and budget.[25] Taylor's fix for limited war dealt with mobility and organization. Flexible Response solutions ignored nationalism as well as political and other elements, despite the influence of these factors in different combinations on the limited conflicts that had flared up since World War Two in Greece, Eastern Europe, Korea, Indochina, the Philippines, Lebanon, Laos, and the continuing crises involving Berlin. Both Gavin and Taylor discussed "lessons" from the Korean War and the French experience in Indochina. But both generals concluded that if these were limited wars, then nuclear weapons were not appropriate. The country needed other means to win. General Taylor, one analyst concluded, "could no more accept than most other generals the proposal that the army, which he had fought to modernize and improve in terms of mobility and firepower, must become not more sophisticated but more primitive in order to deal effectively with the Viet Cong."[26]

Support for the French in Indochina, almost a decade of military advice and support, recent experiences with subversion in Laos, and the specific efforts in South Vietnam since 1961 made Vietnam a text case for flexible response. Diplomatic historian John Lewis Gaddis concluded that "rarely *have* accomplishments turned out so totally at variance with intended objectives."[27] The US Army's doctrinal response continued to reflect the maneuver and firepower paradigm of World War Two, despite the institutional tumult of the 1950s. The resistance efforts assisted by the Office of Strategic Services in World War Two gave way to paramilitary support by the Central Intelligence Agency and the creation of the US Army Special Forces. In 1952 the 10th Special Forces, Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, fell in at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, but soon deployed to Bad Tolz, Federal Republic of Germany. The 10th group had a highly classified operational orientation to support and help sustain resistance efforts in denied areas of eastern Europe in the event of general war.[28] American army doctrine set up real barriers to action against insurgents engaged in revolutionary guerrilla warfare, despite Clausewitz's advice that doctrine should be *how* not *what* to think.

Doctrine

The Kennedy administration's emphasis notwithstanding, counterinsurgency struggled "with a difficult vocabulary, [and] tended to blend into small-unit tactics, and it was never distinctively or satisfactorily elaborated as such."[29] Conventional, small-unit infantry operations were little different, as embraced in the counter-guerrilla orientation of the MAAG in Vietnam. At the same time a hybrid, technological, doctrinal, and organizational challenge well suited to the US Army's post-World War Two sense of itself emerged: airmobility. Airmobility, another concept-to-capability, benefitted from the maturation of military aviation concepts and technology. Other influences were the observed experiences of both the French and the US Marine Corps as well as intensive experimentation and furious study during the 1961–1964 period.

Drawing on cavalry doctrines from the 1930s, US Army combat developers drew up concepts and crafted experiments to fulfill Lieutenant General James Gavin's "vision of a 'sky cavalry.' "[30] Mobility to disperse rapidly and then concentrate forces appealed to the army leadership, struggling with how to adapt the army to an imagined nuclear battlefield. One army study drafted in 1957 found that " 'required forces, then, for the small war appear to be much the same as those for the atomic war against the Soviet Union.' " Analysts also examined the use by the French of helicopters for tactical and operational mobility in Algeria in their war against insurgents.[31]

The US Army constructed and conducted experiments to test these concepts and to help write doctrine. Winning over Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, the Army staff quickly organized an entire division,

structured in accordance with these airmobile concepts. The 11th Air Assault Division (Test) activated in February 1963. Concurrent with these efforts in the United States, army pilots had gained valuable experience in South Vietnam for several years, supporting ARVN operations.[32] Despite this material and programmatic progress, doctrine development could not keep pace.

The US Army's doctrinal evolution history concluded: "Where there should have been clarity, confusion reigned."[33] The whole of the post-World War Two period was one of doctrinal flux. Intransigence, even in the face of strategic defeat, indicated that

> intellectual changes can sometimes be more difficult than material changes. One of the purposes of doctrine is to ensure common thinking, but when changes are necessary, that common thinking can become an obstacle for needed modifications or improvements. When the major components of a doctrine are established, military leaders must recognize that attempts to operate in a different manner, even on an emergency basis, can only be accomplished with great difficulty.[34]

US Army doctrine did treat small wars in field manuals throughout the 1950s. The army's military historians published works on partisan warfare based on World War Two case studies. Articles appeared from time to time in the professional military education journal *Military Review*.[35] Developing a system to promulgate doctrine was another problem that the US Army struggled with during the tumult of the 1950s.

Right questions, wrong answers

Various studies and internal commissions culminated in March 1962 with an upper-echelon reorganization involving Combat Developments Command and the Continental Army Command, shifting proponency there for the doctrinal processes. All army branches had to review and give input to doctrinal materials. Once drafted, doctrine provided the justification for drafting documentation to match resources of men and material to requirements. This system was cumbersome as well as slow, compared to the gulf that opened between doctrine and actual conditions on the battlefields since the two previous wars. The doctrine development system was also sensitive to parochial branch interests and the internecine conflicts among branches for pride of place – the infantry as the "queen of battle" – as well as resources.[36]

One of the first crises to face the Kennedy administration was the failure of CIA-organized and -supported anti-Castro paramilitaries at Cuba's Bay of Pigs. Despite this disaster, insurgency and counterinsurgency became important topics of discussion and debate. "Counterinsurgency became the 'fad' in Washington in 1962," wrote one historian, "inspired from the very

top of the pyramid. The Army had to react; it had to make a practical working doctrine from the sometimes impulsive policies from the top."[37] Army leadership showed reluctance to embrace President Kennedy's enthusiasm for small wars and counterinsurgency. Richard K. Betts found that

> it seemed especially impossible as well as undesirable to segregate policy, strategy, and tactics in an unconventional war. Where the enemy fought with irregular and phantom units and where revolutionary political organization was as much or more a source of his strength than the number of his battalions, it seemed obvious that policy and tactics were inextricable and constantly had to be adapted in tandem.[38]

Even the recall to active duty of General Taylor did not help the army focus on the new president's concerns. In a senior officer debriefing session, General Taylor recalled that in response to President Kennedy's questions about what the army had done to respond to small wars, "I gave him the conventional line, 'We good soldiers are trained for all kinds of things. We don't have to worry about any special situation. We're taking care of that.' Well that didn't satisfy him a nickel's worth."[39] Taylor may have residual concern for Kennedy's view of the army after the answers given the president about ground military options – divisions of soldiers with use of nuclear weapons not ruled out – during the Laotian crisis.[40]

The then-classified Stilwell boards – "Army Activities in Underdeveloped Areas Short of Declared War" and "Report on Counter-Insurgency Operations Course and Related Matters" chaired by Brigadier General Richard G. Stilwell – concluded "that the Army could make an important contribution to the internal defense of underdeveloped nations of the free world and that the Army should make a major effort to increase its participation in such activities." In addition to using existing Special Forces, the report recommended that the entire army respond to these requirements.[41]

General Stilwell, on behalf of the Chief of Staff of the Army, found that

> the activities under survey (the unconventional, unorthodox, paramilitary, military assistance by another name, or whatever) are simply auxiliary weapons within the total array of US power resources and that they are effective only when applied in coordination with those other resources. The articulate proponents thereof notwithstanding, they represent a complementary rather than an alternative means. Moreover, as is the case with all other power resources, they can be properly applied only in the wake of a prior enunciation of clear and constant objectives sought vis-à-vis any area or country.[42]

Stilwell identified shortcomings in army doctrine and training as well as an inability to conceive of operations and strategic actions as taking place in an inter-agency context. Addressing these shortcomings was the army's job.

The general also took the army to task for failing to implement the guidance of what the army saw as non-traditional roles. Soldiers needed to understand that it was the army's job and this understanding should come about through rigorous study.[43] Stilwell's report also pointed out army responsibilities for assuming control of overt operations involving paramilitary operations like the CIDG program. But the general also observed that "it is one thing to be authorized or directed to assume responsibility; it is quite another matter to be adequately prepared to discharge that responsibility without disruption of the tempo or continuity of operations."[44]

General Stilwell concluded a lengthy list of recommendations with a challenge:

> The Army is thus presented a magnificent opportunity to project its resources and to make a major contribution to US security interests in a vital long neglected area; and under conditions which assure maximum control and flexibility of planning and programming for the area as a whole. The long sought basis for coordinated forward country planning for low intensity areas has been provided; the Army's challenge is to exploit it fully.[45]

The Stilwell report was the result of a small staff effort and received limited distribution, directed as it was towards the Secretary and Chief of Staff of the Army. The follow-on Howze board soon "addressed a full gamut of areas of concern, ranging from recommendations for the 'Transfer of Unsuitable Personnel' from special warfare units, to recommendations for 'Preparing the Army at large for the task' of special warfare." The cumulative effect of this follow-on report had an outcome that General Stilwell could have envisioned.

The Howze report singled out doctrine as needing special attention. Counter-guerrilla requirements found themselves dressed up as counterinsurgency capabilities and dealt with in a very conventional manner. All branches should have a hand in the development and execution of doctrine. There was also the recommendation that doctrine undergo review "with respect to counter insurgency and counter guerrilla operations, to include the role of Army aviation, and develop dynamic and imaginative doctrine to support this field." Offices sprang to life at the Pentagon to make good on the army's commitment to counterinsurgency in process if not in practice.[46]

After several years of effort and with the specified interest of President Kennedy,

> immediately orienting the Army toward counterinsurgency in early 1961, by late 1964 and early 1965 the Army was still struggling to come up with an effective program of counterinsurgency doctrine that would mesh with the conventional organization yet still allow meaningful implementation by Army troop-level units.[47]

One US Army historian concluded that from the end of the Korean War until the commitment of ground combat forces in South Vietnam,

> the Army had suffered through a number of dramatic changes in its tactical doctrine. These abrupt shifts in the focus of its doctrine forced the Army to reconsider every aspect of its tactics, organization and equipment. Considering the sweeping nature of the changes, the ability of the Army to respond to counterinsurgency needs was remarkable.[48]

Remarkable in the sense that it failed to come to grips with the fundamental terms of references in the revolutionary guerrilla war in Vietnam.

The battlefield evidence from South Vietnam by the end of 1963 indicated that not only was the security situation a shambles, but political and social issues were very much in play, despite almost a decade of direct American assistance and advice. One observer, equating small wars to "low intensity conflict," concluded that part of the American difficulty was this mix of contexts: "What distinguished low intensity conflict from other forms of conflict is not the scale of violence as such but the fact that violence is embedded in a political context that directly shapes and constrains it."[49] In addition to political issues, social and cultural variables like the history of Vietnamese–Montagnard enmity complicated the violent equation.

Discontinuities

A new, well-bred horse

The Howze report provided an analysis of the strategic environment of the Cold War. "Semi-military, low intensity operations have been launched," board members wrote, "and carried on among political cross currents in a manner cunningly contrived to make military intervention by the United States undesirable." Further, the board report stated that the "chaos which results when internal security cannot be provided to a nation is the favorite and most effective environment in which Communist organizers work." The US Army needed new direction for its doctrine and training to meet the new challenges, diverging from the previous focus on hot requirements of either dealing with partisans or instigating resistance among subject peoples.[50]

Responding to new threats and requirements was a large undertaking. Analysts indicated that the "task is not, however, inconsiderable, and its proper accomplishment will require specific guidance to and energetic administrative and logistic support of the units and schools which must get the job done."[51] The Howze board concluded that all resources were inadequate. Recommended solution sets fixed upon what had become traditional lines of drift within the army: technology, force structure, and proscriptive doctrine. Pushed to the periphery were human and organizational factors critical to the success not just of elite units but to all military organizations.

The major recommendations of the Howze board centered on exposing the entire army to counterinsurgency through doctrine and training changes. Allocations of divisions and separate battle groups to regional commanders for planning and operational purposes would follow shortly as units absorbed counter-guerrilla skills through training. Neither interagency participation nor military civic action received attention. Three infantry divisions would provide a battle group each to form the core of an airmobile force for experimentation and testing of concepts. The army would bend all efforts towards procuring the required numbers of new turbine helicopters – "Huey" helicopters – to support experimentation and operational employment.[52] The army's Special Warfare Center would cease to operate independently and would fall under USCONARC. The center would yield operational control and support relationships previously required by the center's role as force provider. Psychological operations would receive the resources to support worldwide operations.[53]

Military assistance programs (like the one functioning in South Vietnam) would not continue to serve as the primary instrument of helping client, lesser developed states to mobilize paramilitary forces. The vehicle for this assistance, essentially a Special Forces Group, augmented with aviation and other support, did not take full advantage of the army's resources.[54]

Howze's board devoted a segment of its report to a review of the context of counterinsurgency operations. This segment highlighted the role that popular support played and the importance of indoctrinating target populations. The austere, simple material requirements for military operations received attention as did elements of military art like mobility and troop preparation. This segment of the board report substantiated the recommendation that the broader army should address counter-guerrilla challenges. Left alone were any references to the cultural, economic, or political motivations that provide the basis of insurgent indoctrination efforts.[55]

A strong argument supported the recommendation that an experimental unit should test all aspects of helicopter-mobile, counter-guerrilla operations:

> The force, once formed, would be put through a series of tactical experiments to tactics and techniques. Exercises should be conducted on a day-by-day basis, uncomplicated by any necessity for formal reports. The commander of the force should have almost total latitude in the modification of his organization and equipment. He should be excused if there should occur in the course of these experiments an unusual number of accidents, because it will unquestionably be necessary to engage in exercises which involve danger to the soldiers who perform them.

The operational intent was unequivocal. Helicopter-borne units would demonstrate

> that the mobility of the regular force would for the first time, in many situations, surpass that of the guerrilla, and perhaps the initiative would also pass to us. We would be able to ambush *him*, surround *him* occasionally, harass and tire him, and cut his lines of supply.[56]

The fundamental point to counterinsurgency and counter-guerrilla operations was "a matter of special training in tactics and techniques."[57]

A few good men

The Howze board's recommendations dealing with personnel offered that instead of "attempting to entice officers into the special warfare field, DCSPER [the army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel] should assign them to such duty in accordance with the priority of the activity. Officers so assigned should be from the upper 50% of their grade and branch." Senior officers would require only a short orientation course for service with Special Forces.[58] Little special in the way of selection or training was needed to fill personnel requirements.

Brigadier General William Yarborough, commandant of the Special Warfare School, was a member of the Howze board along with a small element of Special Forces personnel. Yarborough had taken command of the Special Warfare Center in 1961, following World War Two service with the airborne and recent duty in Europe with counterintelligence. Yarborough and the other Special Forces cadre proved unable to communicate the unique nature of the individual Special Forces soldier and his contribution to his team. Nor were the Special Forces representatives able to make clear the team's capabilities as potentially greater than the sum of its parts or the role of the subjective education and training process that often took a year or more to produce "Green Berets." Missing as well was any recognition of or reference to the unique capability provided by the different Special Forces operational detachments, each comprised of a cross-section of critical skills resident in the experiences, training, and maturity of noncommissioned officers and triple-volunteer officers.

Board findings made no mention of the critical role that the educational and training processes played in producing Special Forces soldiers. After volunteering and meeting the criteria for application, soldiers underwent anything from six months, to more than a year's military education and training in their occupational specialties' then cross-training in the other core disciplines. Graduation from the Special Forces qualification course meant that an individual was trainable. He was not awarded the skill identifier as a Special Forces soldier until he spent some time in an operational assignment and received the recommendations of his unit's commanders

and command sergeants major. Richard Betts characterized Special Forces soldiers thus:

> The ideal Green Beret was supposed to be an ambassador, propagandist, medical and economic aide, applied anthropologist, and surrogate ward heeler for the client government. He was to inspire loyalty, confidence, and anticommunist nationalism in remote peasant villages and serve as an intelligence agent. His military role was limited: training irregular native troops and conducting isolated ambushes with small-unit tactics that seemed trivial to a conventional professional soldier.

As the board's report began its distribution after its release in August 1962, in the discourse between Saigon and Washington General Maxwell Taylor narrowed the working definition of counterinsurgency "to military considerations of applied force, reducing the emphasis on political, economic, and psychological factors."[59]

Counterinsurgency was a discontinuity as far as the larger US Army seemed to remember. Historian Andrew Krepinevich questioned "whether the Army was willing or able to effect proposed changes" to organize and train to fight irregular wars even after the Howze and Stilwell studies. "In fact, the Army was not taking," Krepinevich concluded, "the difficult and expensive steps to indoctrinate and train its soldiers to fight insurgents."[60] As the war in Vietnam eclipsed Special Forces contributions at the end of 1963, the "conventional innovation" within the US Army of airmobile doctrine and force structure flourished with counter-guerrilla topics added to all training schedules): "The success of the airmobile doctrine, however, was largely the result of its sponsorship by the dominant clique in the postwar army: the airborne club."[61] Despite the enhancement to battlefield mobility, tactics, and operational capabilities that came from the adoption of helicopters, "good tactics cannot prevail when embedded in bad strategy. The strategic factors in counterinsurgency relate to politics and not to military concerns."[62]

In the Vietnam War, Betts concluded that

> counterinsurgency, as naively ambitious as it may have been, had been a fusionist doctrine for a war where military and political functions were tied more closely than in any other war the United States had ever fought. In terms of professional military advice and influence, this was precisely the problem.[63]

There was also pressure on the army from Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara. The secretary wanted to take a hard look at requirements for battlefield mobility and effectiveness.[64] The army decanted its new wine of widespread, helicopter mobility into the old bottles of military solutions for military problems, scarcely observing that its growing problems in Vietnam

were only in small part military. Measuring effectiveness or developing appropriate metrics also escaped study if not related to traditional measures of mobility or maneuver.

The US Army made the comfortable choice to adopt the transformation of airmobility as its cure-all for battlefield mobility and flexibility. These capabilities seemed to provide the operational solutions to challenges that grew out of the near chaos of the budget, doctrine, and organizational controversies that raged throughout the 1950s. Choosing airmobility satisfied army elites and was consistent with previous branch-based cultural dynamics, favoring the combat arms. This new cavalry, though, did not embrace the faded legacy of the frontier horse soldiers that adapted to the very different challenges of the northern Plains or the arid Southwest to use indigenous scouts. Neither did the larger army recognize that the required terms of engagement were very different in Vietnam.

Conclusions

The mixed legacies of World War Two and the Korean War offered uncertain signals for senior leaders, doctrine writers, and those charged with trying somehow to prepare the US Army for its future conflicts. At least the army was in good company with regard to confusion. Leaders and the led at the State Department and in at least two presidential administrations got much wrong with their assumptions and actions with respect to helping South Vietnam. Coupled with the ugly, often public battles over roles and missions, budgets, force structure, and the growing role of acquisition politics, the confused legacies of recent war fighting confounded most protagonists. In retrospect the almost ten years of direct American support to a free, non-communist South Vietnam, based on assumptions drawn from Korea or World War Two, failed to produce success by any measure.

Context of change

The beginnings of American involvement in Vietnam came on the heels of the gargantuan efforts required to mobilize for and win World War Two and battle to a standstill in Korea. There was a vast gulf intellectually and otherwise between the relatively clear contexts of total war against the fascist regimes and those of an ally struggling to hold onto the fragments of empire in a restive colonial possession. Add to these challenges the shock of an unexpected conventional war in Korea, and the elements of maneuver and attrition in its short history. Finally consider the longer-term stresses and confusion associated with waging the new, "cold" war against authoritarian aggression by a former ally on a worldwide basis by an America eager to turn its attentions to domestic business and issues in a period of economic preeminence and growth. Despite the changes and confusion, military considerations to protect and defend the United States

had to maintain some continuity. But military men would have done well also to heed Clausewitz: "All planning, particularly strategic planning, must pay attention to the character of contemporary warfare."[65]

The changes in domestic and international politics and policy provided fundamentally different circumstances for defense, doctrine, and strategy. "It follows that the transformation of the art of war resulted from the transformation of politics," Clausewitz also argued, "so far from suggesting that the two could be disassociated from each other, these changes are a strong proof of their indissoluble connection."[66] The context of change, though confusing, was hardly new to soldiers and politicians. Conflicts inside the defense establishment and within the administrations of both presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy helped obscure the very real nature of changed strategic and operational circumstances, especially in Vietnam.

Doctrine and organizational learning

Doctrine represents the central element of explicit knowledge in the US Army, during the period of the First and Second Indochina Wars and now. Military doctrine represents an attempt to codify a service's common-to-all orientation to the "how tos" of military art and science. These doctrines express desired principles and often preferred techniques. A focus on promulgating common understanding through doctrine, or a fixation on technology, can obscure the influence of contingency and context – "fuzzy stuff." "But this stuff around the edges," in the words of two knowledge management researchers, "is not as irrelevant as it may seem. It provides balance and perspective. It holds alternatives, offers breadth of vision, and indicates choices."[67]

The 1950s combined the chaos and demands of war, cold and hot, further roiled by domestic political considerations of the United States. This combination provided one more challenging context to the army's struggle to write and apply doctrine. In military organizations, core competencies range from the application of doctrinal principles by units and individual soldiers to firepower, the applied capabilities of weapons systems. Organizational learning "refers broadly to an organization's acquisition of understandings, know-how, techniques, and practices of any kind and by whatever means."[68]

Knowledge – what and how organizations learn and how this influences what they can do – is central to identity and function. Both what and how can change over time.[69] Contexts and conditions require constant assessment, lest an organization fall into a "competence trap," where "an experience of perceived success leads an organization to persist in a familiar pattern of thought and action beyond its time and conditions within which it yields successful outcomes."[70] The process of questioning and matching conditions and contexts to missions and strategy will often call into question the relative positions and worth within the organization of elements and structures, their actions and capitalization. As a consequence, this questioning

> is almost inevitably a political process in which individuals consider, whether they choose to be decisively influenced by such considerations, how the inquiry may affect the standing or their reference group's standing, within an organizational world of competition and contention.[71]

Discourse and experimentation can bring about "dynamic conservatism," insisting on "adhering to past patterns of practice in the face of information that should have caused them to change."[72]

Failed or inconclusive change management activities can produce skepticism and defensiveness.[73] This defensiveness manifested itself in the army's myopia with regard to counterinsurgency after it wrestled with implementing New Look: preparing concepts, doctrine, organizations, and training for decentralized battle in a nuclear environment. It felt the sting at the same time of shrinking budgets that forced the army to choose between technologies like missiles and atomic artillery, and mobility enhancements like armored personnel carriers and helicopters, while it dealt with advisory challenges like Vietnam's, close on the heels of the French defeat and the Korean War's armistice.

The US Army had been involved with the Vietnamese forces for more than a decade when Sergeant First Class Paul Campbell went into that first Rhade village in November 1961. Responsibility for the ARVN had rested squarely on the shoulders of senior, accomplished army leaders like generals O'Daniel, Collins, and Williams from 1954. Other influential army leaders like General James Van Fleet had demonstrated first-hand in Greece that helping to organize broad-based responses to insurgent challenges required more than closing with the enemy's military units. Unfortunately the army neither recognized nor embraced the mission to help the nation's allies and surrogates organize and fight off insurgent challenges. This myopia led the US Army onto those new helicopters to do battle.

Lessons unlearned

The First Indochina War matched a doctrine and operational scheme of firepower and maneuver against the organization and execution of a revolutionary guerrilla war that eschewed force-on-force confrontation. Soon after the guns fell silent in 1954, American assistance to the fledgling Army of the Republic of Vietnam organized, equipped, and trained it to fight the same sort of conventional war against its enemies. American doctrine and experience developed and drawn up during this same, sanguine period failed to acknowledge any operational or strategic requirements of fighting and winning against the very different opponents who waged revolutionary guerrilla warfare. Choosing and applying a technological solution to enhance battlefield performance like airmobility was a discontinuity and a disruption to both successful adaptation and innovation. Decisions to

resource the airmobility-based changes obscured the very real differences observed yet misunderstood from the struggles of almost a decade of direct influence in Vietnam.

Clausewitz recognized that war as a collective human behavior behaved in ways similar to other endeavors. He wrote in Book Eight of *On War*, "we must face the fact that war and its forms result from ideas, emotions, and conditions prevailing at the time."[74] Reviewing several different historical case studies, Clausewitz concluded:

> Each period, therefore, would have held to its own theory of war, even if the urge had always and universally existed to work things out on scientific principles. It follows that the events of every age must be judged in the light of its own peculiarities. One cannot, therefore, understand and appreciate the commanders of the past until one has placed oneself in the situation of their times, not so much by a painstaking study of all its details as by an accurate appreciation of its major determining features.[75]

The phenomenon of each war has its own peculiarities, continuities, and discontinuities that determine political, strategic, and operational requirements, perhaps even to the tactical level. Failure to acknowledge the peculiarities of context and challenges – implicit in clinging to outmoded concepts, doctrine, organization, or technologies – also helps create an "innovator's dilemma."[76] What is the catalyst for change for organizations – that perceive themselves to have appropriate doctrines and equipment – that cannot or do not correctly assess the strategic and operational challenges?

Clayton Christensen's analysis in *The Innovator's Dilemma* dealt with the "how" – and "how not" – of organizations facing the dilemmas of "disruptive" technologies. Organizations under competitive pressure had to develop behaviors that encouraged and provided resources for change as well as potential development and marketing for new products or services.[77] Applying Christensen's analytical perspective to airmobility helps explain the army's zeal in adopting the traditional innovation of enhanced maneuver using helicopters, all but crowding out counterinsurgency. With the primacy of military considerations in what passed for counterinsurgency by 1963, greater battlefield mobility to enable massing of forces and firepower at a decisive point had great appeal. Christensen followed up *The Innovator's Dilemma* with more study and produced *The Innovator's Solution*. In this work Christensen concludes that CEOs and senior business leadership had to develop an understanding of the *forces* that shaped innovation and facilitated change. The understanding of leaders came from studying and coming to appreciate changes in markets, technologies, and methods – changes in contexts. This bears a striking similarity to the conclusions reached by one contributor in the classic, three-volume *Military Effectiveness*.

Lieutenant General (Retired) John H. Cushman wrote of a cycle of challenge and response between the national military institutions and the respective requirements of World War One, the interwar period, and World War Two. Cushman singled out "insight" as a critical analytical in assessing response. "How well," he asked, "did individuals responsible in a situation perceive reality? How well did they understand the nature of the challenge that confronted them?" Cushman posited "execution" as another critical analytical aspect of response: "how well did they adapt to what Clausewitz called 'real war' as opposed to war on paper?"[78]

Cushman concluded that there is both volition and process at work. Men made choices, well or badly: "it's not 'chance' that creates superior military institutions and their forces, but men." The process of execution was "not a simple self-executing process, or a process that anyone can carry out. A high order of institutional and individual insight – coupled with plain, ordinary efficiency – is needed for successfully carrying out the process."[79] What leaders and their organizations *know* shapes what they can *do*.

Ambassador Robert Komer, involved with Vietnam for almost a decade with two different presidential administrations and one-time head of pacification efforts in country, asserted that four broad lessons suggested themselves from the Vietnam War. "Perhaps the key lesson to be learned from our Vietnam experience," he wrote, "is that atypical problems demand specially tailored solutions – not just the playing out of existing institutional repertoires." Institutions have real limits: "the policymaker must take fully into account the ability of the institutions carrying out the policy to execute it as intended." Implementation of innovation, Komer's "adaptive response," "requires much more than well-conceived policy; it requires adequate machinery at all levels for effective follow-through to see that the policy is effectively carried out, and to force adaptation where essential." Finally he addressed the remote-control nature of "largely fighting a war by proxy," in which "effective means of stimulating optimum indigenous performance are essential."[80]

How did Komer think policy makers could choose these adaptive steps? Good leadership – *"flexible and imaginative"* – needs training and incentive systems that reinforce "flexibility and adaptiveness instead of applying the 'school solution,' and . . . innovation and experiment rather than conformity." Mission-focused training "may be best to set up autonomous ad hoc organizations to run them – with the requisite funding, resources, people, and other backing to do the job." Combining military, political, and development solutions to unique challenges "can best be dealt with by unified management at all levels." The leaders and managers at the top need their own staffs. "He must have his own eyes and ears, and means of ensuring adequate follow-through."[81] Finally, analysis must be rigorous and on-going.

Special Forces soldiers, from the actions of a lone medic working among the Rhade, applied what they knew to what had to be done among the

Montagnards and eventually other minorities. The resulting village-based, defense-oriented CIDG program secured for the Saigon government as well as the United States' efforts an extension of influence into remote portions of the fledgling South Vietnam, turned back insurgent organization and recruiting efforts, and provided a vivid picture of both the capabilities of assistance and its very real limitations. Military metrics of violent contacts, casualties, weapons lost or recovered did not predict or support the confusion that reigned in the closing days of 1963 as the South Vietnamese military junta struggled to find its way, in spite of what "the book" said.

4 Counterinsurgency in Vietnam

Competing discourses

Clausewitzian elements influenced the United States in its long involvement in the wars of Indochina: "Chance, free will, and necessity – all interweaving by working together as one; chance by turn rules either and has the last featuring blow at events."[1] The country changed its policies towards Vietnam as the United States changed presidents in 1961. President John F. Kennedy increased intervention in Vietnamese affairs. He did so out of perceived necessity. The United States provided increasing amounts of financial aid, military assistance, and advisors to support the continuing policy of containment. The experience of the Korean War gave priority to military aspects of aid to counter "wars of national liberation" as the Cold War developed in the 1950s.[2] US Army responses chose the culturally and doctrinally familiar in response to the incessant, internal struggles for defense resources and the intellectual struggle to assimilate "lessons" from World War Two and Korea.

Kennedy received advice early in his administration that made the compromise of South Vietnam seem unsustainable for both domestic and international policy reasons.[3] The strategic context was one of revolutionary guerrilla warfare (RGW) between insurgents in South Vietnam – with the support of the communist North – and the South Vietnamese government, attempting with its American ally to build a non-communist alternative to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The new American president and his administration chose counterinsurgency as the key operational mechanism to attain their strategic objective of helping defend the South. How did the nature of RGW shape the battlefield? There was a competing discourse concerning the measures considered and chosen. What did counterinsurgency, as a course of action, involve?

Advice and support

The American Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Vietnam began to create the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in 1955, MAAG efforts closely paralleling United States Army organization of the

period. This "mirror imaging" followed the recent historical experience of the Army advising foreign armies in Greece and Korea. Reinforcing this experience was the generalized assumption that the ARVN would enhance internal security.[4] A biographer of one early MAAG chief, General Samuel "Hanging Sam" Williams, observed "Sam continued to prepare for an attack from the north in which the communists would use conventional forces and tactics."[5] Williams developed and enjoyed a good relationship with President Diem. These cordial relations contrasted with the MAAG chief's almost adversarial relations with Ambassador Eldridge Durbrow. Enmity in the American mission grew not just from personalities but also from a convoluted command relationship with the commander of US forces for the Pacific being Williams' superior rather than the MAAG chief's usual position as, subordinate to the ambassador.

The ARVN did little to make most Vietnamese in the South more secure. Diem's regime did little to broaden its appeal to or inspire confidence in the diverse population south of the 17th parallel. Seizing the initiative, insurgents combined nationalism, the party discipline of the Viet Minh, hard-won experience from the war against the French, and organization to step up their campaign against an ostensibly democratic South Vietnam. This dynamic insurgent synthesis *was* revolutionary guerrilla war. As the ARVN and its American advisors failed to come to grips with the insurgents, diverse voices from Saigon to Washington engaged in a discourse about the terms and means of engagement.

Revolutionary guerrilla warfare

The DRV at first provided only direction and sympathy to the southern insurgent movement, "building north, looking to the south."[6] Figures show no traceable infiltration from the north until 1959–1960, when fewer than 5,000 people went south.[7] It appears, though, that at least some of these infiltrators were the catalyst for the "people's war" which had begun in earnest. The end of 1959 saw the dedication of People's Army units to developing and expanding what would become known as the Ho Chi Minh trail, as a network of infiltration routes to the south. Established on 19 May 1959, Military Transportation Group 559 had initially two battalions dedicated to this mission. These units, the 301st Land Transportation Battalion and the 603rd Sea Transportation Battalion, began to provide access to the South.[8] These units provided support for the growing insurgency.

"It can be said," General Vo Nguyen Giap observed, "that one of the striking particularities of the revolutionary war in the South, of the comprehensive character of this war, *it is developing simultaneously in two forms – political struggle and armed struggle – in a long period*."[9] The Viet Cong (the name a derisive Diem regime title for Vietnamese communists) fought a revolutionary war using techniques that had evolved from the long

war with the French, punctuated by several years of consolidation against other nationalists during the Japanese occupation. Bernard Fall explained that what these insurgents "are out for is to destroy the authority of the South Vietnamese Government over its own population – particularly the peasantry."[10]

Douglas Pike, then a foreign service officer with the US Information Agency in South Vietnam, breaks the Second Indochina War into two parts. The first war began between 1958 and 1960. This first war was an insurgency, growing and changing until 1965. At that time, a second war began with the introduction of American marines and soldiers as combatants to battle main force units of the Viet Cong and regulars from the DRV.[11] Elements of the People's Army of Vietnam deployed south through Laos and Cambodia along the maturing infrastructure of the Ho Chi Minh trail. "Based on our defeat of the 'special war' waged by the Americans and their lackeys," the People's Army of Vietnam's official history recounted, "we would continue to maintain and expand our offensive posture and make preparations to crush the US plan to mount a counteroffensive during the 1965–1966 dry season."[12] The special war referred to was the successful defensive political war in the hamlets and villages of the Montagnards. There was also enormous concern on the part of the insurgents that the Strategic Hamlet Program might enjoy similar success.

Pike argued that RGW was a unique Vietnamese adaptation of the Chinese people's war and a Vietnamese tradition of resistance. This adaptation had "as its aim to establish a totally new social order, thus differing from insurgencies whose objective is either statehood or change of government."[13] Pike concluded this doctrine was "based largely on a mishmash of piecemeal military maxims and semi-political aphorism accumulated over the years chiefly from the writings of Chinese and Vietnamese revolutionaries." Mao Zedong's "Protracted War" did have a particular impact on the National Liberation Front's doctrine and theory.[14] Many contemporary observers, Pike felt, became either intimidated by the Mao–Giap cult or let themselves fixate on "flashy" guerrilla forays while ignoring the patient, detailed organizing that took place at the village and hamlet level: "Just as we overrate the military significance of revolutionary guerrilla warfare, so do we underrate its power as a social force."[15] The central force of National Liberation Front success in the insurgency was its matching of political and military organization as well as the tradition of struggle.

Struggle, *dau tranh*, had a rich historical tradition in Vietnam seeded in its resistance to foreign invasion and occupation. Pike found that the National Liberation Front conjugated *dau tranh* between political and violence programs. Cadres tried to connect the grievances, real or imagined, of target populations to broader themes of the insurgency. If persuasion failed, these cadres employed selective terror as they had during the First Indochina War against symbols of government authority in the villages and towns. Teachers, tax collectors, officials would change sides or die in a grisly

manner to demonstrate insurgent resolve. Unchecked, this violence and access to the rural target populations made the Diem regime even more vulnerable.[16] This tradition of struggle linked with protraction of conflict was a genuine adaptation, one that helped defeat the French. It would confound the Americans as well.[17]

Mao Zedong was a critical intellectual force in defining and refining concepts of RGW. This war would be more than a war of words:

> A revolutionary war is never confined within the bounds of military action. Because its purpose is to destroy an existing society and its institutions and to replace them with a completely new state structure, any revolutionary war is a unity of which the constituent parts, in varying importance, are military, political, economic, social, and psychological. For this reason, it is endowed with a dynamic quality and a dimension in depth that orthodox wars, whatever their scale, lack.[18]

Political and military considerations interlock and mutually reinforce.[19] RGW has a particular set of principles derived from the unique characteristics of the antagonists and context. To try to apply principles of war without an appreciation of these particulars was " 'cutting the feet to fit the shoes.' " Mao found "the important thing is to be good at learning."[20] In a well-organized campaign of terror, VC insurgents selectively assassinated and abducted numerous local officials: "they [the insurgents] began to dismantle the South Vietnamese administration and to replace [it] gradually with their own men."[21]

The growing conflict in the South would be a "protracted war" dictated by the characteristics of the weak guerrilla against the strong government and its allies in a semi-colonial setting. Time favored the insurgents in RGW allowing adaptation as circumstances changed. Every weakness of the government became a target in the protracted conflict. "To decide the issue [war]," Mao wrote, "subjective effort must be added, namely, the directing and waging of war, man's conscious dynamic role in war." In Mao's words, ideas sway men when "politics develops to a certain stage beyond which it cannot proceed by the usual means, war breaks out to sweep the obstacle from the way."[22] People were the center of gravity in RGW.

Assassinations of village chiefs, government school teachers and other officials and sympathizers rose from 193 in 1958 to 239 in 1959 and 1400 in 1960. Kidnapping almost doubled during the same period.[23] These actions, carried out with impunity, jeopardized the regime's tenuous legitimacy. Chalmers Johnson noted in *Revolutionary Change* that "the prime characteristic of revolutionary conditions, in the opinion of many political theorists, is the 'loss of authority.' "[24] Pike's analysis agrees with this assessment of the vulnerability of Diem's regime. Government, in disarray and impotent, and a "lack of adequate leadership skill" as well as "conservatism" in political and economic reforms or potential solutions came together to all but doom

Diem's government. Pike assessed as ineffective the series of reforms and pacification programs like the *agroville* initiative of 1959–1961 and land development centers as well as the Strategic Hamlet Program of 1962. Efforts of the Can Lao were equally ineffective at broadening economic opportunity beyond cronies of the regime.[25]

The authority of Diem's regime declined as its legitimacy eroded under the pressure of insurgent attacks which it could neither deter nor repel. Attacks on local outposts often succeeded, yielding weapons and propaganda value. Because of this deteriorating situation, in 1960 the United States recognized the requirement for changing its assistance efforts in Vietnam. "The NLF," as Pike succinctly put it, "initially approached the entire Revolution not as a small-scale war but as a political struggle with guns, a difference real and not semantic."[26] Le Duan, party secretary and an important political theorist in the communist North, predicted:

> by actively taking the North towards socialism we create conditions for the revolution in the South to develop vigorously and to win victory, for the revolution throughout the country to advance, for the full deployment of the strength of the Vietnamese revolution itself combined with the strength of the whole socialist camp and that of the movement for peace and national independence, with a view to isolating and finally vanquishing the most cruel and dangerous enemy of our people, the US imperialists, to achieving national reunification and building a peaceful, unified, independent, democratic, prosperous, and strong Viet-nam.[27]

The NLF possessed a powerful combination of political, nationalistic, and military practices and language to wield as weapons against the brittle Diem regime. According to the insurgents, at the end of 1960 five years of struggle against Diem and the Americans was already behind them. Against this potent combination, there was a cacophony of disparate voices in the Diem government, the American embassy, the MAAG, and others. Each voice competed for the attention of leaders in Saigon and Washington as each called for a different course of action to counter the insurgency.[28]

A realization emerged in 1961 – spurred in no small part by the insistence of President Diem – that the American-trained and organized Republic of Vietnam armed forces could not provide internal security. The American–Vietnamese model rested on a divisional structure (though "lighter" in terms of arms and equipment than its American counterpart). ARVN units had not come to grips with the illusive insurgents after five years of direct assistance and a crescendo of support as the French withdrew. There was a vigorous discourse in the late 1950s and early 1960s among civilian and military officials, reporters, and scholars about how to fight a limited war by proxy. This discourse manifested itself in a competition for legitimacy in South Vietnam with President Diem. One of the myths of American

involvement in Vietnam assumes a small war conundrum: seldom discussed or regarded, small wars easily overwhelmed soldiers and statesmen. The detailed and broad-based evidence of a competition for policy primacy belies this persistent myth.

Counterinsurgency: competing discourse

Assessment and analysis of how to help the fledgling Republic of Vietnam remain non-communist began in 1954, even before the American advisory effort supplanted the French influence. A US Air Force officer on loan to the CIA came to Saigon, fresh from participation in a decisive victory over communist insurgents in the Philippines. Colonel Edward Lansdale had visited Vietnam for assessments before the French defeat. His posting to Saigon in June 1954 as head of the Saigon Military Mission under the auspices of the Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM) came with the full knowledge of the TRIM's first commander, General John "Iron Mike" O'Daniel.[29] Lansdale soon became the unofficial advisor on psychological operations to the staff element or 5th Bureau of the Vietnamese Army staff. "Vietnamese in uniform were teamed with the soldiers of the French colonial forces," Lansdale quickly found,

> fighting a Communist enemy amongst a population yearning for independence from France. The Communist enemy continued to pose as the only true nationalist force in Vietnam and, though this camouflage had worn thin during the long war, the enemy kept its psychological lead over the Vietnamese Army.[30]

The South Vietnamese – and Americans – would have to develop the awareness that the people were the object of the conflict and needed protection.

Lansdale's biographer, Cecil B. Currey, quoted him just before this assignment to Vietnam as skeptical of the sufficiency of military operations against insurgents: "It's not enough to be *against* communism; you have to be *for* something."[31] Lansdale traveled widely, including a trip north to Hanoi during the massive refugee operation. When the new ambassador, J. Lawton Collins (General, retired), arrived, he and the freewheeling Lansdale did not get along. Lansdale, however, had formed a relationship with President Diem. This relationship began at the end of 1954 when Lansdale had prepared and presented one-on-one his candid comments on dealing with the religious and other sects.[32] Lansdale returned to Washington for assignment at the Pentagon in 1956.

Disagreements: military advice and assistance

Competition arose among those attempting to advise the Saigon government on how best to counter the insurgency as the Kennedy administration

settled into power. Colonel Lansdale and the new chief of the MAAG, Lieutenant General Lionel McGarr, expressed divergent ideas and solutions about how South Vietnam could deal with its security challenges. McGarr had come to Vietnam from the US Army's Command and General Staff College. McGarr had served as the staff college's commandant. While there, he had studied counterinsurgency and, soon after his arrival in country, produced a manual for counter-guerrilla operations entitled "Tactics and Techniques of Counter-Insurgent Operations."[33]

A Department of State official, Roger Hilsman (himself an Office of Strategic Services veteran of Unit 101 in the China–Burma–India theater in World War Two), was Director of Intelligence and Research. Hilsman also had the ear of the new American president. By November 1961 Hilsman had completed a comprehensive analysis of insurgencies and security issues in lesser developed countries and distributed it around Washington. Ambassador Frederick E. Nolting, Jr., Durbridge's successor, brought this Policy Research Study, "Internal Warfare and the Security of the Underdeveloped States," to McGarr's attention.

In addition to the diversity of opinion among the Americans, Sir Robert Thompson, attached to the British mission in Saigon, presented recommendations drawn from impressions and lessons of the empire's recent experiences against the "C-Ts" or communist terrorists in Malaysia. The recommendations for rural security had special appeal to President Diem. It was Colonel Lansdale, though, who had the only experience with both hands-on counterinsurgency advice and Diem's peculiarities.

The "Ugly American's" advice

Then-Colonel Edward Lansdale, perhaps the foremost American expert on insurgencies, was one of Diem's principal US supporters. A former OSS officer with a background in psychological operations as well, Lansdale noted that "the people of a country are the main feature on a battleground of Communist choosing, since the ensuing struggle becomes one between the Communists and the government over which will have the allegiance of the people."[34] Lansdale had played a key role in the American support of Ramon Magsaysay in defeating the Hukabalap rebellion in the Philippines. Purportedly, Lansdale was the inspiration for the sympathetic US officer Colonel Hillandale in the best-selling novel *The Ugly American.* In the chaos of Diem's first election after the Geneva Accords, the energetic Lansdale was very active. He had helped open direct access to the Vietnamese president's office from the Central Intelligence Agency's top officials in Vietnam. This access provided opportunities to assess Diem or his brother's positions and influence likely actions.[35]

Cadres of former Viet Minh in stay-behind roles had found fertile, rural ground for agitation. Rural security responsibilities fell to a Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps.[36] Responsible to the province chiefs, these paramilitary

organizations were "poorly trained and equipped, miserably led, and incapable of coming to grips with insurgents."[37] These critical local security forces were not within the purview of the military and hence had little training and less equipment in the sort of aggressive, light infantry tactics and operations that might have been applicable against guerrilla insurgents.

The security situation continued to deteriorate from late 1959 into 1960, exacerbated by the inability of the Diem regime to mobilize popular support. Ambassador Durbrow reported that government policies had become more authoritarian in response to insurgent challenges. These policies created more discontent and further alienated Vietnamese across class and regional boundaries.[38] Colonel Lansdale made the point that Vietnam's security challenge

> may appear to be a military problem, but actually it is much more than this. It seems to me that the US should take a hard look at this problem while it still permits solution within our present scale of effort.

Colonel Lansdale began a series of Washington, DC assignments after leaving South Vietnam. After a brief posting at Headquarters, US Air Force, he became the deputy director, Office of Special Operations, Office of the Secretary of Defense. This position put Lansdale in touch not only with senior defense staffs but with policy makers at the State Department, the CIA, and ultimately the White House.[39] Lansdale reported on the deterioration in South Vietnam's internal security in a June 4 1959 memorandum to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. In anticipation of Diem's subsequent requests for targeted assistance from the MAAG to counter this worsening situation, Lansdale found that the

> US has remarkably few experienced officers in this category, since experience in Greece and Korea has little application to guerrilla forces native to an area and supported by the mass of local populations, such as in Vietnam. Most US Army officers in Vietnam and the Philippines during the major campaigns there against Communist guerrillas had little opportunity to learn the counter-guerrilla tactics that were most successful.

Army special warfare "advisors" could quickly adapt according to Lansdale, and their lessons could help shape American doctrine.[40] American military aid went primarily to the Vietnamese Army, the ARVN.

Organizing and equipping the ARVN became an American responsibility in 1956, directed at repelling a Korean War-style assault from North Vietnam. The ARVN trained along conventional lines. Invasion from the North, however, was not the threat. As early as 1959, Lieutenant General Samuel "Hanging Sam" Williams, Chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group, noted in correspondence to the staff of the Commander-in-Chief,

Pacific that the "[South] Vietnamese are no longer conducting operations against religious sects but against guerrilla bands reportedly led by Viet Cong cadres."[41]

Lansdale argued that Vietnam's insurgent problems were political ones. "Without," he maintained, "a sound political basis for operations, military actions can only provide a temporary solution." Lansdale recommended that senior Department of Defense officials explore this approach with their counterparts at the Department of State.[42] When Ambassador Durbrow requested special forces for assistance in providing "anti-guerrilla" training in February 1960, Colonel Lansdale supported this request and observed: "This is the type of warfare we need to understand more thoroughly than we do today."[43]

Recently promoted Brigadier General Lansdale's January 1961 visit to Vietnam coincided with the transmission of the Counter Insurgency Plan (CIP). Lansdale reported to the outgoing Secretary of Defense at the same time that the "US should recognize that Vietnam is in a critical condition and should treat it as a combat area of the cold war, as an area requiring emergency treatment." The survey of South Vietnam's situation detailed political, military, and economic weaknesses, concluding that, short of "extraordinary measures," the Viet Cong could overthrow the government. Extraordinary measures included political reforms to open nascent democratic processes to Diem's non-communist opposition, military reforms to make the internal security mission primary, and psychological measures to "attract loyalty of [the] population." Lansdale further observed that only "Americans sensitive to Asian concerns and open could be effective" as advisors.[44]

Lansdale was well known for his accomplishments and expertise in small wars. He was by no means a mainstream professional officer, having participated in psychological operations and military civic action extensively in World War Two and in the Philippines assisting President Magsaysay. Lansdale lectured often on related concepts and topics in many venues. Examples include a January 1960 address to the Armed Forces Staff College, "Military Psychological Operations," a talk at the Air War College in March 1961, "Unconventional Forces," and a June 1961 lecture at the US Army's Special Warfare Center, "Introductory Comments on the Huk Campaigns."[45] Lansdale's perspective was very different from that of the MAAG's new chief, another voice in the competing discourse.

American counter-guerrilla advice

Lieutenant General Lionel C. McGarr inherited the complex situation in Vietnam as head of the Military Advisory Assistance Group in late 1960. McGarr came from the Army's Command and General Staff College where he had served as Commandant. McGarr was a veteran of ten World War Two campaigns with the 3rd Infantry Division, serving as a regimental

commander and the Assistant Division Commander. In the Korean War, McGarr was an Assistant Division Commander with the 2nd Infantry Division before taking command of the 7th Infantry Division in 1953. His staff at Forth Leavenworth had prepared an extensive study which led McGarr to conclude that the insurgency was South Vietnam's greatest threat.[46] McGarr further concluded that emphasis for the ARVN should shift to counter-guerrilla operations.[47] This change in emphasis coincided with ARVN initiatives begun by Diem to organize, train, and utilize highly mobile ranger units to take the fight to the guerrilla forces of the insurgents.[48]

The Country Team – consisting of senior, in-country representatives from the embassy, Agency for International Development, United States Information Service, MAAG, and the CIA – drafted the CIP and forwarded it to Washington for approval in January 1961. The CIP recommended a larger, indigenous armed force to take the initiative and go after the guerrillas.[49] The ambassador, Elbridge Durbrow, sent several cables from Vietnam as the security situation worsened and before the acceptance of the CIP. Durbrow felt Diem had to bring about internal reforms to counter the insurgency:

> Psychological shock effect is required to take initiative from Communist propagandists as well as non-Communist oppositionists and convince population government taking effective measures to deal with present situation, otherwise we fear matters could get out of hand.[50]

The CIP, though, focused overwhelmingly on military operations. Durbrow's successor, Frederick E. Nolting, followed a similar azimuth. The new ambassadors said that the MAAG had studied the problem and recommended the CIP. Furthermore, it had considered recent actions by the British in Malaya: "While British success in Malaya against guerrillas offers much that is useful and pertinent in guerrillas war with the Viet Cong, this has already been studied and incorporated where [sic] in MAAG training and doctrine."[51] After giving the CIP close attention, President Kennedy approved it.[52] In country and at war, the plan called for what was essentially counter-guerrilla operations, not a counterinsurgency. The CIP expanded advisory efforts for the ARVN, fighting the "real war." It ultimately supported the Strategic Hamlets Program, that would grow out of specific recommendations from Sir Robert Thompson.[53]

McGarr told his advisors "there is seldom a 'purely military' answer to the domestic unrest in which guerrilla action flourishes and without eradication of the *cause*, guerrilla actions historically drag on for years." Further, the chief specified military advisory tasks: "First, reduce or eliminate VC intervention from outside. Second, prevent the growth and possible *final complete* military success of VC military action, *while awaiting* solution of the political 'causes.'"[54] McGarr called for adaptability, but stressed traditional means of small-unit tactics and firepower. The ARVN would

have to protect the population, but it would best do this by seeking out VC units and training the Civil Guard. The paramilitary forces of the Civil Guard had been maintained and they reported to civilian, provincial authorities. As a consequence, it was neither well armed nor trained. McGarr exhorted his advisors to help their counterparts gain and keep the tactical initiative through offensive action. "Our objective must be to find, fix, fight and *finish* the enemy! No half measures will do. Time is our most precious commodity and the *urgency* of the situation requires that we use every second gainfully."[55]

The MAAG chief collected and published a compendium of his work, research, and thoughts on the situation in South Vietnam and on "counter-insurgent" operations entitled *Tactics and Techniques of Counter-Insurgent Operations*.[56] In seven parts, this document was "an objective extension of US doctrine, MAAG Vietnam recommended doctrine, Vietnamese and French counter-insurgency operations, British experience in Malaya and Burma, Philippine operations against the Huks, and Chinese and German concepts – all tailored to fit the situation in Vietnam."[57] The document's bibliography backed up an ecumenical approach, listing sources that included Mao, British experiences in Malaya, partisan and counter-partisan accounts from World War Two, and studies of the recent French and Viet Minh experiences in the recent Indochina war.

Although McGarr referred to potential political orientation of guerrilla fighters – including a reference to Mao's protracted war ideas – *Tactics and Techniques* overwhelmingly focused on military problems and solutions. "The problem confronting VN [Vietnam] today," McGarr wrote in his introduction, "is one of a politico-military-psychological-economic nature which *cannot* be resolved by military means."[58] He later adds that the "solution lies in the coordinated use of additional military, political, social, economic and psychological power or actions with the objective of *truly* winning over and motivating the population to a *common purpose*."[59]

McGarr proposed only military answers, though, to Vietnam's broad-based security questions. The balance of *Tactics and Techniques* read like an infantry operations manual with chapters devoted to friendly and enemy forces, and the conduct and principles of anti-guerrilla operations. In an August 1961 aide-memoire to President Diem, McGarr emphasized what to him was critical: "The solution lies in increased emphasis on the job of killing Viet Cong."[60] What about the people in the hamlets and villages? A British proposal, drafted by Sir Robert Thompson, complicated matters. It became central to the Diem regime's implementing what became the Strategic Hamlet Program.

British advice

Thompson headed the British Advisory Mission in Saigon. He had been in Malaya throughout the emergency, from 1948 to 1960. After several visits,

the British government posted Thompson – along with several other long-serving colonial administrators – to Saigon with the small British Advisory Mission. Central to the British approach to countering insurgency was the primacy of securing the population, attempting to deny insurgents access to the people. This approach met with instant approval in Saigon. Diem's government began experiments with population control in 1958. This program, the *agrovilles*, resulted in widespread resettlement, forced labor, and repression at the village, further alienating target populations.[61] Thompson based his recommendations to the Diem regime on his participation in and study of British efforts in the twelve-year Malaysian emergency. Thompson had concluded that

> the overall aim of any counter insurgency plan must be to win the people. The killing of communist terrorists [a term from the Malaysian emergency] will follow automatically from that. If the main emphasis is placed merely on killing terrorists there is a grave risk that more communists will be created than are killed. Winning the people must, therefore, be kept in the forefront of the minds of every single person, whether military or civilian, who is engaged in anti-terrorist operations.[62]

The South Vietnamese implementation of British advice became the Strategic Hamlets Program.[63] Thompson further recommended a pilot program in the densely populated Delta region to allow the South Vietnamese government to experiment with this initiative. Critical elements of this latter proposal included the conduct and coordination of anti-terror operations, civilian emergency measures, intelligence gathering, propaganda, and social improvements. Regrouping at-risk hamlets and villages was a critical emergency measure. Thompson would eventually argue that defended villages had a long tradition in Asia in reaction to weak central authority and rural brigandage.[64]

The Strategic Hamlet Program resettled rural populations into new, "safe" villages separated from traditional farming lands and family plots. Population controls would include checkpoints, identification cards, and curfews. In return, the 1962 strategic hamlets promised local security and other benefits that the army and provincial administration could not, by and large, provide. The Self-Defense Corps and Civil Guard – later Regional and Popular Forces – would protect these hamlets, according to the plan, but lacked the capabilities to do so.[65] Resentment over resettlement and forced labor burned inside many rural Vietnamese. Insurgent efforts fanned the coals of this anger.

Discord

Lieutenant General McGarr was sensitive to what he considered encroachment by the British-recommended program. He pointed out in a memorandum to President Kennedy's personal military advisor, General

Maxwell D. Taylor, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Lyman Lemnitzer, that the MAAG's Counter Insurgency Plan already had incorporated Thompson's main recommendations. Lieutenant General McGarr also felt that Thompson ignored the very real differences between Malaya and Vietnam with regard to training local security forces.[66] In a subsequent correspondence, the MAAG chief restated the strategic intent of the American-backed Counter Insurgency Plan:

> The over-all aim is to eliminate Viet-Cong strength in the Delta by concentrating the combined political, economic, military and psychological strength of the government in successive geographical areas to obtain the active support of the people and establish firm governmental control, while at the same time maintaining constant pressure on the Viet-Cong in other areas of Vietnam.[67]

President Diem's enthusiasm for Thompson's recommendations provoked some American grumbling in Saigon. In a January 1962 memorandum to General Taylor, Thompson stressed the congruence between his proposals and the American plans. ''The basic principle in this campaign,'' Thompson wrote, '' must be to control, protect and win the population in the rural areas. In order to do this, it is essential to establish a solid security framework which will protect the population.'' Such a program would take patience and time.[68]

There was enough of an appreciation of the potential lessons from the British experiences in Malaya, that the Institute for Military Assistance at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, had reviewed and published a British manual, *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya*, in 1958. In the tradition of the USMC *Small Wars Manual* published just before World War Two, the British manual was a compendium of military tactics and techniques (not unlike McGarr's writing on the subject).[69] Australian and other Commonwealth observers visited South Vietnam. The British Advisory Mission made training seats available in their military schools of application in Malaya.

"Fight the war you're in . . ."[70]

American advisory efforts shaped the Army of the Republic of Vietnam into a conventionally organized, trained, and equipped force.[71] Such a force might defend the south against a Korean War-type invasion from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam with its road-bound, heavy units and its operational orientation to seek force-on-force confrontations. The ARVN trained to ''find, fix, and fight'' the enemy. The insurgents, however, were not that obliging.[72] The South Vietnamese government had been putting pressure on the Military Assistance Advisory Group for different training than it received for the army by 1961.

General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, wrote General Taylor a memorandum in October 1961 offering his thoughts on the counterinsurgency efforts in South Vietnam. The chairman discusses the value and limits of applying British techniques that emphasized the role of civilian police from Malaya. General Lemnitzer also noted that successful campaigns took place in both the Philippines and Burma based on military models, as well as defending the training given the army in South Vietnam. Successes against the insurgents came from army actions. General Taylor departed for Vietnam in early November to assess the situation first-hand.[73]

General Taylor's October 1961 Vietnam trip produced a report to President Kennedy. Taylor's recommendations pulled together numerous strands of advice into a cable that pulled American advice and support towards an increasingly militarized belay point. The trip report details numerous enhancements for engineering, advisory, transportation, and support capacity. "To execute this program of limited partnership," Taylor recommended, "requires a change in the charter, the spirit, and the organization of the MAAG in South Vietnam. It must be shifted from an advisory group to something nearer – but not quite – an operational headquarters in a theater of war."[74] This significant shift in operational and strategic intent – coming as it did on the heels of the flawed neutralization of Laos, in part because the American service chiefs offered no acceptable American military option to the president – would change both the size and the character of the American commitment to what was ostensibly the South Vietnamese opposition to the insurgency.[75]

Militarizing the counterinsurgency solution in South Vietnam was the "flexible response" Taylor offered after retirement and before returning to active duty to serve President Kennedy. Between Taylor's role as Kennedy's military advisor and a significant voice in what would soon be the White House-based Special Group, Counterinsurgency, and Robert McNamara's reorganization of the Department of Defense, the most responsive levers of national power were military. Diplomatic historian John Lewis Gaddis would later conclude, though, that assumptions governing this military emphasis – "that force could be applied in Vietnam with precision and discrimination; that means existed accurately to evaluate performance; and that the effects would be to enhance American power, prestige and credibility in the world" – had fatal flaws. Further, these assumptions "reflected a curiously myopic preoccupation with process – a disproportionate fascination with means at the expense of ends – with the result that a strategy designed to produce precise correspondence between intentions and accomplishments in fact produced just the opposite."[76]

Struggling from migrations of many former Viet Minh soldiers and supporters drawn north, the insurgents had organized to bring a patient, people's war as RGW to the south. Overrunning a local outpost, stealing its weapons, and vanishing into the night before help could come not only filled arms caches, it fed the idea that the government could not protect the

people of the villages and hamlets. At the same time, with some help from their communist neighbor to the north, skilled propagandists entered the villages. They would discuss their vision of a better Vietnam; and collect taxes – often in kind – sometimes conscript labor, resorting to terror as they deemed it necessary. More and more of rural South Vietnam slipped from government control as poorly trained and equipped local security forces and the US Army-advised ARVN proved unable to either protect the people or defeat the insurgents.[77]

The National Liberation Front relied on a tradition of struggle, ideology coupled to an admixture of organization and violence annealed during the First Indochina War. The struggle for control of South Vietnam began when the nationalist exuberance faded after the reluctant French withdrawal. South Vietnam's nascent democratic regime proved to be neither democratic nor efficient. Several attempts at reform, especially at the rice-roots level in the countryside, served only to engender ill will and grievances about land tenure and political equity. Between the Diem regime's attempts to foster personalism as an ideological counterbalance to the DRV's communism and Saigon's heavy-handed treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, more discontent reached across cultural and other boundaries. Discontent became opportunity for the patient insurgents.

The competing discourse on how best to counter the insurgency did agree on principles. Security was paramount. How could the Diem regime forces – so recently equipped, organized, and trained to repel a cross-border invasion – operate, with their thin veneer of discipline, among the diverse populations of the South to provide security and at the same time improve the lives of the rural peoples? They could not. Security meant a reliable presence at the hamlet and village level. These local security forces, poorly armed and trained, mostly served as distributed source of weaponry for the insurgents.

Civil and economic improvements were other common principles of the competing discourse. But stumbling district and provincial administrations were not safe from intimidated or endemic corruption. Far from Saigon or Hue, geographically and in concept, administrators and functionaries found themselves threatened by insurgents or cajoled by elites, but they often proved unable to provide much for the populations of their jurisdictions. Disposition and training of the ARVN made it all too likely that their fleeting presence would reduce the population of loose chickens but do little to improve life at the rice-roots level. Near-indiscriminate use of artillery or occasionally air support by the ARVN during a rare encounter with insurgent forces brought mostly destruction.

Elements of all of this sometimes discordant advice on how to counter the insurgency affected what had happened in hamlets and villages in South Vietnam since that first Special Forces sergeant drove to Ban Me Thuot. Special Forces soldiers met, trained, led, and lived among the Montagnards in the Central Highlands beginning in November 1961. Swirling around

the Village Defense then Civilian Irregular Defense Group programs, an increasing number of American military advisors cajoled and patrolled with the ARVN in search of elusive bands of guerrillas. South Vietnamese administrators began the latest effort at resettlement and development at the rice-roots level in 1962 as the Strategic Hamlet Program quickly tried to reach into hundreds of hamlets and villages. By 1963, all of these programs were in the field, but they produced very different results.

5 Choosing the wrong trails

Special Forces soldiers went about their quotidian, small-war duties across South Vietnam: teaching classes, running small arms ranges, holding sick call for Montagnard communities, laying out engineering projects, issuing patrol orders, conducting rehearsals, and patrolling. The discordant discourse in Saigon and Washington did finally disturb the day-to-day activities in CIDG camps. Orders from MACV and other Operation Switchback measures spurred the opening of new camps and accepting of new responsibilities. New camp locations were often in more isolated areas, closer to South Vietnam's western borders. Montagnard and other minority communities in these areas had not had as much contact with non-Vietnamese outsiders, nor were they as well developed as the Rhade. Less was known about these areas and their residents. Pre-mission planning and preparation – the hallmark of successful special operations – was less detailed and ultimately less effective. MACV mandated new coordination with South Vietnamese district and province chiefs rather than with leaders of the Montagnard and other minority communities. The geographical isolation of these new mobilization efforts created new, local security missions during the critical, initial stages of mobilization and training. These differences affected the execution and ultimate chances for success of these new camps.[1]

Support for Border Surveillance and Mountain Commando operations required recruiting and deploying forces out of their home regions, away from their villages and hamlets. This policy was in line with the December 1962 MACV guidance to launch half of available strike forces from Area Development Centers and camps on offensive operations. It was also more difficult to screen volunteers for reliability as the number of camps expanded. Finally, South Vietnamese district and provincial officials often deferred military civic action projects until local security measures took effect.[2]

Roger Hilsman, the Office of Strategic Services veteran directing intelligence efforts at the State Department, argued that efforts to counter the insurgency needed more than military approaches and had to incorporate development measures. Hilsman favorably assessed the CIDG program several times in late 1962 and throughout 1963. In an "Eyes Only" note to President Kennedy, Hilsman praised the Special Forces efforts: "Under this

program over 35,000 Montagnards have been trained, armed, and assisted in setting up their village defenses, the eventual goal being one hundred thousand." "The Agency [CIA] is making a sincere effort," Hilsman said referring to Operation Switchback's progress, "to carry out this decision, but serious difficulties are arising from the Army's rather inflexible budgetary and personnel procedures."[3] CIDG program successes and the ambitious spread of the Strategic Hamlet Program in 1962 at last put efforts and resources of the Diem regime and the United States against the principal strategic front of the insurgents. Organizing and mobilizing the rural population of South Vietnam's more than 14,000 villages and hamlets for a long-term struggle pitted combatants, at least for a while, against one another with the same goal of gaining either the support or acquiescence of the peasants.[4]

Early 1963 began with an increase of violence. This increased operational tempo included the well known Battle of Ap Bac. A VC battalion stood and fought elements of the pursuing ARVN force for an entire day, rather than dispersing as daylight came. The ARVN task force used some of the most sophisticated weaponry that their American advisors could help them bring to bear. Reinforcing ARVN troops rode into battle on helicopters piloted by American army aviators. Other ARVN reinforcements attempted to close with the VC fighting positions mounted in new M113 armored personnel carriers. Despite the efforts of the ARVN and their advisors during that very long day, as night fell the VC battalion did slip away.[5]

One significant measure of effectiveness for the CIDG program was the crescendo of violence directed at its camps by the insurgents as 1963 came to Vietnam. The VC called this war in the villages the "special war."[6] As American-led Special Forces efforts expanded, pacification by the South Vietnamese had begun in only six of the forty-one provinces.[7] Meanwhile the insurgents singled out Plei Mrong (in II Corps' Pleiku province) for special attention on January 2–3 1963 (see Map 3).

When things went wrong

The basso report of a Browning automatic rifle fire shattered the late-night quiet of January 2–3 1963. A turncoat village defender entered the camp dispensary at Plei Mrong, spraying the hut with fire. The medic, Specialist Five Fell, jumped from his bunk and killed the intruder with a carbine.[8] Running from the clinic, Fell saw other village defenders bombing the camp perimeter from the inside with homemade explosives and shooting other defenders in the back. These Montagnards had opened the camp gates. Viet Cong poured in from the darkness outside. Other turncoats handed the Viet Cong weapons and ammunition from stores.

Four of the medic's teammates from ODA 314 rushed to the 81 mm mortar pit and began to drop high-angle fire in and around the camp. Infiltrators and turned-village defenders attacked the pit, driving the four Americans from

the mortar with a shower of homemade TNT bombs. Withdrawing to the 60 mm mortar firing position, they fired some seven and a half cases of high explosive and other rounds. Viet Cong infiltrators tossed grenades about the camp, knocking down the radio antenna at the communications shack and punishing the dispensary. By 0230, their bombardment slowed to the occasional thrown grenade. Aircraft arrived to orbit over the camp to drop illumination rounds as insurgents resumed their attack about 0300. Lighted by the harsh glare of magnesium flares, the small-arms fire and grenade-throwing continued until about 0500. The Viet Cong bound and dragged two strike force commanders out of the compound. Camp defenders found their bodies while sweeping the camp after daybreak, the men beaten to death by rifle butts. By 0615, ARVN reinforcements relieved the brief siege. Other ARVN units moved to positions outside Plei Mrong, attempting to renew the fight.

Strike force members had remained loyal. Some recently recruited village defenders were responsible for the perfidy. An estimated assault force of one to two companies of Viet Cong had struck the camp, some 150 men. Their infiltrators managed to cut the barbed wire defenses and breach the camp's gates. Half of the ODA-314's team had been out of the camp with a unit of strikers. The Special Forces soldiers had conducted tactical operations in the surrounding area away from the camp. Attackers killed thirty strikers and village defenders, and wounded more than twenty. Thirty strikers and defenders went missing. Insurgents captured eighty-six weapons at a cost of fifteen men killed. Sergeant First Class Bowles, one of the camp's US Army Special Forces cadre who had been in the camp, received shrapnel wounds in one hand. He refused medical evacuation. The camp evacuated an ARVN soldier and twenty-eight strikers and village defenders as well as three Viet Cong. Despite the human cost, the Plei Mrong camp held.[9]

After their relief the following day, ODA-314 and the camp's Montagnard complement threw themselves into improving Plei Mrong's defenses. They constructed additional fences, fighting positions, and barriers as well as repairing battle damage. Training halted as strikers and village defenders went through additional security vetting and investigations.[10] Compromised indigenous troops were critical to the insurgent success.

The attack on Plei Mrong provided the first example of the increase in offensive operations directed at Special Forces activities and camps beginning in January 1963. Across the country ambushes, harassment and interdiction small-arms fire, and probes of camp and village defenses, would increase all year. Americans increasingly were in the line of fire. Counterinsurgency efforts that mobilized rural populations and denied insurgents access to this key terrain forced direct challenges. The "Operational Summary" for the combat tempo of seven Special Forces teams in January 1963 (in the II Corps Tactical Zone) reported only two contacts with insurgents. This report separately noted the attack on Plei Mrong. December's

report for II Corps Tactical Zone details three attacks by insurgents (one battalion-sized), 471 friendly ambushes (from squad- to platoon-sized), 126 other combat patrols, and 180 reconnaissance patrols. Ten Special Forces detachments accounted for this increased combat tempo out of their camps and patrol bases.[11]

Village Defense Plan hamlets and villages provided protection for their Montagnard inhabitants as they provided success stories in micro-reform and development. These civic action efforts within indigenous communities combined often reluctant Vietnamese Special Forces trainers and leaders with American Special Forces advisors to address the concerns of rural minorities that made them vulnerable to insurgent efforts.

Camp attacks prompted an effort to disseminate the lessons learned from successful camp defense. Defenders kept fields of fire clear and strengthened protective barriers and obstacles. Camps constructed inner perimeters with access restricted to Americans and vetted indigenous troops or, in some cases, mercenaries – like the ethnic Chinese Nungs – employed as contract security forces by the Americans. This last measure came about after the near destruction of the camp at Polei Krong on 4 July 1963. Sleeping quarters for the ODAs, the camp's tactical operations center and radio bunker, and the aid station, normally were within this inner perimeter. US Navy Construction Battalion, "Seabee," Technical Assistance Teams and US Army engineer advisory detachments provided support for camp construction projects as well as building or improving airstrips (see Map 4).[12]

Switchback takes hold

The Diem regime and MACV supplanted the Military Regions with Corps Tactical Zones (CTZs) in 1963. These new organizational entities ran from north to south, I Corps through IV Corps with Saigon and several nearby provinces distinguished as separate military areas. US Army Special Forces (Provisional) Vietnam continued to support CIDG efforts throughout the country. Special Forces teams came and went, generally on temporary tours of duty from the United States and Okinawa. Switchback-related changes took more than a year as MACV struggled to control the very different logistical system developed initially with flexibility afforded it by CIA funding and the country-wide expansion of the advisory effort. "Even during the negotiations," William Colby, then in Saigon with the CIA, "it became clear that the transfer could not be simple."[13]

Mobilization and training continued as more Montagnard communities reacted to insurgent pressure, becoming refugees or seeking the benefits of moving to areas within the influence of ADCs or existing CIDG camps. Relocating provided a modicum of security, medical attention, and a chance at development. Combat operations – which often began out of a camp or ADC as confidence-builders with newly trained militiamen or

strikers – mostly consisted of patrolling. Specialist training also took place at regional training centers like Hoa Cam, in Quang Nam province of I Corps. Courses included ranger operations, airborne operations and techniques, as well as village health and civil affairs worker fundamentals. Increased contact with South Vietnamese district- and provincial-level chiefs created friction. Administrators at times made changes that affected the highlanders without psychological preparation. The length and breadth of South Vietnam, CIDG elements trained, defended, and fought the insurgency while military civic action initiatives developed real gains for target populations.

I Corps

The I CTZ area of operations butted up against the 17th parallel and a demilitarized zone separating the Republic of Vietnam from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (see Map 3). The Montagnard population was smaller than in the Central Highlands. Communities like the Bahnar, Bru, and Katu had not dealt with the French as those like the Rhade and Jarai in the highlands of II and III Corps.[14] Captain Chase, commander of ODA A-4 at Tra My, Quang Tin province, I Corps, reported in January 1963, that

> a degree of dissension was felt as a result of the Province Chief, Major Minh, formulating and directing several severe changes in the camp without consulting Lt Mung, Presidential Survey Office [the higher headquarters of the Vietnamese Special Forces] of this camp. Additionally, some of the differences in the new policy have caused hardships which may tend to have detrimental affects upon our overall mission.

Elsewhere in I Corps at the Hoa Cam training camp, tension arose over lack of medical assistance, refused by the local district, Dai Loc.[15]

Mobilization of the Montagnards in the northernmost part of South Vietnam came after the success of the Buon Enao experiment. The first camp in the I CTZ opened in March 1962, at Phuoc Son. Five more camp openings followed by year's end. There had been an American Special Forces presence, however, in this region for quite some time, at the Hoa Cam Training Center, from May 1960. This was one of the original three ARVN Ranger centers as well as ultimately home for elements of the CIDG program. By August 1962 the Special Forces training complement had grown to an ODB and three ODAs. Many of the Trailwatchers, Mountain Commandos, and other trained personnel stayed in I CTZ involved in border surveillance as well as local security out of the five camps that were open at the end of 1962.[16]

More new camps had opened in 1962 and others closed as operational focus shifted more towards offensive operations. Population pressure from small Montagnard communities increased their propensity to become refugees when pressure from the VC became oppressive. This pressure

made it difficult to sustain ADCs. Camps closed and relocated closer to the Laotian border. Insurgent pressure against camps also grew. The new camp at Gia Vuc, for example, opened in February 1963 and received mortar fire and infiltration attacks or probes daily until June. A staff historian concluded that a "possible explanation was that the CIDG program was a different approach which caught the VC off balance." What threw the insurgents off was the combination of local security measures *and* aggressive patrolling that protected the indigenous population while keeping the VC on the move.[17]

II Corps

Six camps reported from II CTZ during January 1963. Plei Mrong was one of these camps. Training in five of the camps favored strikers over village defenders or other activities. Operations consisted mostly of combat patrols. Intelligence collection was also a part of local operations. ODA intelligence sergeants put in place agents and attempted to construct a more complete picture of enemy activities and operations going on around their camps as well as among the indigenous populations of Montagnards and Vietnamese.[18]

III Corps

Buon Enao, in III CTZ, had grown to absorb the support of all or part of four ODAs by January 1963. Training priorities shifted towards support of the recently ordered change to offensive operations. At six ADCs under the control of Buon Enao, strike force training took place, with village defenders training in one, and medics and border surveillance elements concurrently training in two of these camps. Two other camps in III CTZ mostly conducted village defender training. Operations often were offensive in nature.[19]

There were three operational foci in III Corps, applicable in all CTZs. Continued hamlet- and village-based mobilization, Border Surveillance, and Mountain Commando operations went on to the extent that ODAs could support them. Mobilization of more indigenous communities not only provided local security, but access to civic action projects and the extension of the Saigon regime's influence. Border operations freed up ARVN forces and provided intelligence on insurgent infiltration. Mountain Commandos combined reconnaissance and combat patrolling capabilities with political prosletyzation and military civic action. These teams ranged through the Central Highlands adjacent to the Cambodian border in western III Corps.[20]

IV Corps

The IV CTZ mostly consisted of the watery Mekong Delta region of South Vietnam. Only two camps reported in early January 1963. Special

Forces training activities were overwhelmingly offensive, supporting ARVN Ranger companies and Catholic Youth organizations. Elements of four ARVN, airborne ranger companies and two paramilitary ranger companies trained as well as more cadre. Courses for clandestine intelligence and sabotage also took place for Vietnamese agents.

Throughout all the CTZs, medical clinics, dispensaries, and roving sick calls continued to treat thousands of patients. Special Forces-trained village health workers and medics staffed these clinics, supervised by ODA medics. As opportunities presented themselves, development activities and civic action projects continued in the vicinities of most camps. This on-going military civic action theme benefitted the Montagnards, Special Forces teams, and the regime's interests.[21]

Training and trends

Training and operations reflected MACV's guidance to be more offensive, but most ODAs conducted civic action activities as they could. Montagnard and Vietnamese patients received treatment in camp and village dispensaries. Engineer support got wells dug, schools, markets, and local stores built, and work on roads and other infrastructure projects. A joint interagency memorandum issued by the Headquarters of USASF(V), MACV, and the Assistant Director for Rural Affairs, US Operations Mission, specified that

> essential to the success of the security effort in these areas is an accelerated program of economic and social development for the local civilian population. It is recognized that the population must develop a stake in their government worth defending if this security effort is to endure.[22]

In addition to village defenders, strikers, Mountain Commandos, Trail-watchers, Rangers, and the like, village health workers received training and went to work in their communities.

US Army Special Forces teams came and went. On temporary duty these detachments adapted to a cycle of transition with the out-going team, assessing for themselves who was trustworthy among their Montagnard and Vietnamese charges and allies. Throughout 1963 the operational focus became more and more sharply offensive, across South Vietnam's four CTZs. The American Special Forces teams began to transition control and support for their camps to South Vietnamese authority and responsibility even as the camps' compliment of defenders and strike forces received training, arms, and equipment. Perceptions existed within the Montagnard communities that the Americans and not the Vietnamese were responsible for assistance and support (see Map 4).

American Special Forces operational detachments coordinated for arms and other support, requisitioning some and paying cash for other elements. "Vietnamese officials have expressed objections to such actions," read one memorandum to ODA and ODB commanders, "on the grounds that they create within the Highlanders concerned, a spirit which leads them to the acknowledgment of American assistance only."[23] The MACV policy specified that support would flow through Vietnamese cadre.

One operational summary from June 1963 reported characteristic activities at three camps of the six camps in I CTZ. "During this period the camp and property thereto was turned over to Vietnamese Special Forces," the report assessed. "This is the initial step toward transference from a CIDG camp to a Border Surveillance base under the auspices of CSD [Combined Studies Division/J3/MACV]." At another camp the operational summary reported:

> training is progressing as originally conceived with 105 men (Hamlet Militia) being trained every two to three weeks. Small patrols operate around the camp for security as well as medium for testing personnel. An intelligence net has proven exceptionally fruitful in reporting accurately the presence and movements of VC within our area.

"Emphasis has been placed," in a third camp, "on operations such as combat and recon patrols. Training was initiated for one (1) new Strike Force Company and two (2) Hamlet Militia Companies. VC probes of this camp continue regularly but with little success."[24]

Roles and missions

Colonel Morton's headquarters published a memorandum on June 26 1963 detailing the roles and missions of American Special Forces personnel serving in Vietnam. The headquarters had the mission of supervising operations, developing policies, and coordinating with other headquarters, American and Vietnamese. With few augmenting forces to assist in command and control, some ODAs had worked directly for the de facto group headquarters. As they became available, ODBs became responsible for "supervision, coordination, and support of all 'A' detachments in its zone of responsibility."[25]

The ODAs advised the South Vietnamese camp commanders on all operational considerations. Morton stressed that detachment commanders were advisors and had to influence "by example and persuasion" with regard to operations and camp defense. Morton also stressed that aggressive patrolling would ensure camp and local security. Continual training or operations were the missions of the strike forces and as

> local conditions and the tactical situation permit, a minimum of one-half of the assigned Strike Forces will be employed in the tactical role at

all times. Examples of this employment extend from the conduct of small ambushes and stake outs to well coordinated combat patrols of approximately 15–20 men.

Larger or longer operations required thorough coordination with South Vietnamese authorities. Clearly the operational focus had shifted at MACV's behest from village-based, defensive mobilization to combat operations.[26]

Counterparts

A handful of South Vietnamese Special Forces participated in some camps with the training and advising. The Luc Luong Dac Biet (LLDB) worked directly for the Diem regime, more as secret police than as unconventional soldiers. This part of the armed forces of South Vietnam was not part of the ARVN until late in 1963. The numbers and experience of the LLDB had real limits. Growing out of the Presidential Survey Office in 1956, the LLDB had become the 77th Special Forces Group in 1960 before becoming just Special Forces. The chain of command was political, not military. Common ethnic Vietnamese attitudes of disdain for the Montagnards and other minorities were often manifested.

The State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research observed that Ngo Dinh Nhu, President Diem's brother, controlled the LLDB, generating fear and using them as part of his base of independent power.[27] These factors had negative consequences as Operation Switchback accelerated and the CIDG program grew.[28] Command of the Vietnamese Special Forces/LLDB shifted to the ARVN following the changes brought about by the October 1963 coup that deposed President Diem. Many elements of the LLDB had been essentially another secret police under the regime's control rather than that of the army. Such turbulence and diversity of missions made professionalization of Special Forces counterparts – a critical catalyst for success – problematic.

Camp conversions and the end of the Buon Enao experiment

Civilian Irregular Defense Group camps converted to South Vietnamese province-level control under the auspices of the Strategic Hamlet Program. Conversion was problematic from the beginning. The traditional enmity between the South Vietnamese and the Montagnards had not abated. Indeed, the intercession by the American Special Forces soldiers strengthened the nascent ethnonationalism of minority communities with both the rearming of highlanders and through the civic action efforts that affected development. Planners assumed that many men would volunteer for incorporation into Vietnamese-led local security forces or the ARVN. This often proved not to be the case.

Buon Enao – home of the experiment that was the catalyst for subsequent growth and support of American Special Forces involvement in paramilitary programs – shifted to Vietnamese control on July 1 1963. Colonel Morton took a personal interest in this transition, directing that "it must not fail." The tenuous nature of the personal relationship between LLDB personnel and American special operations representatives was a source of potential problems until a new LLDB commander arrived. The number of weapons in the hands of the Rhade concerned the Vietnamese. Plans to integrate Montagnard strike force members into the Civil Guard were also potentially troublesome for village- and community-oriented paramilitaries. Other potential problems revolved around the Darlac province chief continuing to support the dispensary at Buon Enao. Montagnards saw this "hospital" as a very real symbol of both American and Vietnamese commitment.[29]

Buon Enao's success as an ADC culminated in 211 secure villages by July 1963. This complex of villages "converted" as the procedure became known to provincial control that same month. American Special Forces advisors turned over their camps to LLDB or ARVN officers. South Vietnamese authorities assumed responsibility for support and coordinating defense under the auspices of the Strategic Hamlet Program. Lethargic support from province and district officials squandered much of the good will developed by the year of mobilization efforts in that part of the Central Highlands.

South Vietnamese provincial officials often could not or would not fund on-going operations like village health workers. Local security considerations suffered because of the lack of a credible understanding or capability offered by the emerging Regional or Popular Forces, formerly the Hamlet Militias and Self-Defense Corps. Military Assistance Program (MAP) resources from the MAAG had not gone towards equipping or training local security forces. Another problem stemmed from the reluctance of strike force personnel to transfer from what amounted to allegiance from American Special Forces to that of either ARVN or LLDB/VNSF personnel.[30]

Colonel Tung, the LLDB commander in Saigon, appointed all LLDB camp commanders while American Special Forces advisors – in addition to advising and training village defenders and strike force members – supervised support including pay for indigenous paramilitaries. Circumstances were often confusing, at best.[31] American Special Forces assisted and advised their Vietnamese counterparts with specific area development centers. US Army Special Forces were also responsible for coordination and supervisory work with other American elements for integrating hamlets into the Strategic Hamlet Program through camp and hamlet turnover.[32]

Switchback completed

Operation Switchback ended with the transfer of control of Special Forces operations from CSD/CIA to MACV on July 1 1963. The very different

intent of Switchback had already made itself felt. Operations in many areas had taken on more offensive characteristics. There was aggressive combat patrolling on the part of some camp complements. While tactically suppressing Viet Cong activities, this change also demonstrated the shift away from defensive, village-based security. These offensive and overtly military operations represented a significant change from the CIDG's formerly political and defensive focus. Camps opened as increasingly military and offensive considerations drove operational decisions. Camps closed because of either mission changes or the lack of sufficient populations to support the effort. This did not include the Special Forces elements involved in border surveillance missions. These border missions shifted to Special Forces control in October 1963.

To the borders

November 1963 saw a new, overtly offensive concept of operations reflected in the mission statement for camps deployed along South Vietnam's borders. "All CIDG projects including border sites," MACV Directive 8409 read, "will parallel, in so far as possible aspects of guerrilla warfare operations as outlined in FM 31-21." These types of operations included offensive psychological operations, mobilization of local populations for self-defense and protection to separate them from the insurgents, and to execute combat operations as possible as well as in support of ARVN forces. This MACV directive also specified that Special Forces operations should prepare for the "demobilization of project by integration into sector strategic hamlet program and absorption of forces into the RVNAF [Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces] force structure."[33]

Camps had opened all along the Laotian and Cambodian borders throughout 1963 under the auspices of the Border Surveillance and Mountain Commando projects. The locations of these camps reflected the operational intent to close the borders to unspecified infiltration. These remote areas did not necessarily have local populations to mobilize. This departure from village-based mobilization stressed both the Montagnards' paid to move and garrison these camps' and the ad hoc support system. This logistics system had to put all classes of supply into remote, short landing strips or onto drop zones. Moving Montagnard fighters meant moving their families. Company C, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne)'s unit history observed that "the Montagnards were loathe to serve in an area away from their families, where the war did not directly concern them, and the prospect of manning a camp like Ashau appealed only to the most adventurous types." Company C, 5th Special Forces Group's unit history also found that "the border camps always had recruiting problems and high AWOL desertion rates. The CIDG elements were paramilitary forces, but certainly not mercenaries."[34]

A November 1963 mission statement that activated a new camp located

at Bu Ghia Map (in III Corps' Phuoc Long province, adjacent to the Cambodian border) stated that

> this camp will place Special forces personnel and LLDB personnel on a known Viet Cong infiltration route. It will also place Special Forces in an area previously ignored or given cursory attention by GVN [Government of Vietnam] personnel due to its location and difficulty in contacting persons living in this area.

Specified tasks included: establishing a fortified camp; training hamlet defenders and a strike force; screening the border and gathering intelligence; and conducting area development activities and civic action.[35]

The December 9 1963 operational summary prepared by USASFV reported eight camps in I CTZ, ten camps in II CTZ, eight camps in newly designated 23 Division Tactical Zone north of Saigon and on the Cambodian border, eleven camps in III CTZ, and five camps in IV CTZ. All camps reported offensive operations as the primary activity of all elements, South Vietnamese, Montagnard, and American. Contact with the insurgents was daily in some cases. Combat intelligence activities, leading to more offensive operations and to help safeguard camps and ADCs, were well developed and commonplace. Patrols roamed freely, denying VC freedom of action and turning up caches of rice and other supplies.[36] Support operations continued to rely on Short Takeoff Or Landing, STOL, aircraft and remained austere. Medical outreach was the most prominent civic action activity across the country. Other civic action construction activities helped families construct bunkers in fortified villages.

The operational tempo around the camps at Buon Sar Pa and Bu Prang in the 23rd Division Tactical Zone north of Saigon were representative of the tactical rhythm as 1963 drew to a close. Half of an ODA supported each camp. Locally developed intelligence helped the camp's defenders anticipate the possible actions of the VC. As a result, patrols resulted in two insurgent prisoners taken, a VC base camp consisting of longhouses and caches destroyed, and documents captured. Training focused on Border Surveillance elements and coordination conducted with South Vietnamese authorities to conduct later training for Hamlet Defenders and health workers. A US Navy construction augmentation team completed an air field at Bu Prang. To support psychological operations, the ODA showed American films dubbed in Vietnamese and Rhade languages.[37]

Disengagement and disappointment

The MACV operational guidance to US Army Special Forces Vietnam was offensive. Orders stated that the intent was "to deny the border regions to the VC by detection, interdiction, harassment and elimination of routes of infiltration."[38] Many changes came about as a result of this reorientation.

Historian Andrew Krepinevich characterized the influence of MACV on the CIDG program

> as a rapid expansion in the program that did not allow for the proper development of local security forces as in the earlier Buon Enao project and a shift from the establishment of mutually supportive village defense systems to offensive operations into VC base areas and the development of border surveillance forces.[39]

As limited Special Forces resources responded to this guidance, the confidence and support of their Montagnard charges had to transfer to their traditional antagonists, the ethnic Vietnamese.

Vietnamese district and province administrators became responsible for support across all the classes of supply, pay for militiamen, strike force members, and village health workers. South Vietnamese Special Forces or LLDB – controlled by the Presidential Survey Office, not the ARVN – assumed responsibility for advising and training in mobilized communities. Although present in many camps, LLDB teams varied in capability and influence across the country. As militaries mirror their societies, LLDB personnel often manifested the same distrust or disdain for the Montagnards found in other parts of the Vietnamese society.

Abbreviated time lines left little time to prepare the Montagnards psychologically for these changes. "The result of this bungling," in Krepinevich's estimation, "was the alienation of the population and the collapse of the program itself. As it spread into other areas, the program was bastardized."[40] Border surveillance operations had remained under Combined Studies Division/CIA control through most of 1963, but in October this changed. At this time MACV assumed responsibility through USASFV for the remaining elements – Border Surveillance and Mountain Scouts/Commandos – of the CIDG. This shift marked the completion of the reorientation from the political-defensive original intent of the Village Defense Program to the military-offensive intent of CIDG.

Colonel Morton saw several problem areas assessing decisions and operations in late 1963. "There appears to be a lack of understanding," Morton wrote:

> of the needed flexibility of operations in the higher headquarters. Special Forces needs control and some centralization of command, or the effort will become as disjointed as the ARVN Operations, where each little chief has autonomy. There are too many people trying to jump on the bandwagon who do not understand the concepts of the Special Warfare aspects of counterinsurgency.[41]

To accomplish its missions, American Special Forces assisted Vietnamese Special Forces in preparing and executing training with an emphasis on the Central Highlands.

Responsibilities for the CIDG program, though, encompassed nationwide, paramilitary operations to develop the loyalties and fighting potential of other minority groups. Once mobilized, trained, and equipped, these minority communities successfully committed themselves to defending their interests and to some extent those of the Republic of Vietnam. Analyst Douglas Blaufarb found in his study of this period in South Vietnam that

> What had originally been a system of interlocked village defense groups supported by strike forces drawn from al the villages in the group became a rather different type of program. The CIDG volunteers became full-time soldiers numbering eventually some fifty thousand in all. They were stationed at special camps built in remote areas from which they patrolled, identifying targets for air strikes and conducting raids against VC installations. Their families usually lived in the camps with them, but in other respects the CIDG were full-time professionals fighting under the command of the Vietnamese. Fighting was an occupation to which the tribal populations took with more ease than the Vietnamese, especially in the mountains which were their homeland.[42]

Few of the agents of the Diem regime – or its successor juntas – in district or provincial administration or the ARVN and LLDB could effectively control or lead as well as provide support for Montagnard or other minority communities.

Command and control

Organization as well as command and control of USASFV followed the Special Forces doctrinal model of FM 31-21. A Special Forces Operating Base (SFOB) controlled four "B" detachments and thirty-six "A" detachments. An additional ODA remained under Combined Studies Division/CIA control. Only the personnel of the SFOB were permanent party, assigned for a tour of duty in South Vietnam. The balance of forces were on temporary duty status, borrowed military manpower, from Special Forces units on Okinawa or from Fort Bragg, North Carolina.[43]

At the time of Colonel Morton's departure in October 1963, his units served across South Vietnam. The breakdown of ODBs and ODAs by Corps Tactical Zones (CTZs) is shown in Table 5.1.

Special Forces in Vietnam consisted of 126 officers and 544 enlisted men as of October 26 1963. Most were temporary duty as complete teams – ODAs or ODBs – from either Okinawa or Fort Bragg, North Carolina, representing the 1st, 5th, and 7th Special Forces Groups (Airborne). The 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) on Okinawa contributed eighteen ODAs, three ODBs. From North Carolina ten ODAs, one ODB, and one C-Detachment (a battalion-level command and control detachment headed by a lieutenant

Table 5.1 US Army Special Forces (Vietnam) order of battle, command and control, December 1963[44]

	ODB	ODA
I CTZ	1 (Danang)	6
II CTZ	1 (Pleiku)	8
23rd District Tactical Zone	Special control unit (split between Ban Me Thuot and Nha Trang)	6
III CTZ	1 (Saigon)	11
IV CTZ	1 (Can Tho)	5

Table 5.2 Growth in camps and Area Development Centers, 1963[45]

	Training Centers	*I Corps*	*II Corps*	*III Corps*	*IV Corps*
January 1963	1	1	7	5	2
July 1963	1	6	13	18	7
December 1963	2	13	10	19	5

Table 5.3 Civilian Irregular Defense Group Program enlistment/personnel measurements

CIDG Hamlet Militia	37, 918
Strike Force	14,645
Border Surveillance	2,376
Mountain Commandos/Scouts	4,912
Village Health Workers	559
Patients (treated)	781,461

colonel) came from the 5th and another eight ODAs from the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne). With the normal period of temporary duty set at six months, there was a constant churning of detachments into and out of CIDG camps and assignments.[46] Almost every detachment in three of the army's four Special Forces groups had the opportunity to go to South Vietnam between 1961 and the end of 1963.

Colonel Morton assessed the CIDG program at the end of his command tenure as a general success. "Difficulties," though, he wrote, "encountered in this program have been isolated cases of unwillingness or incompetence on the part of the VNSF/LLDB to actively follow a program of training and operations. Restrictions by province chiefs have also hampered operations in some cases."[47]

The number of ADCs and CIDG camps reflected the orientation towards the Laotian and Cambodian borders and the absorption of Border Surveillance and Mountain Commando projects (see Table 5.2).

Camps on the border had combat-oriented missions, more like frontier forts than area development centers. This growth trend also reflected

MACV guidance to take the offensive. Where the number of camps dipped in late 1963, camp turnover/transition may well have occurred (see Table 5.3).

One part of the 5th Special Forces group (Airborne) history characterized the group's operational focus as combat:

> During the 1963–1964 period the primary job of the Special Forces was offensive. They operated and trained indigenous troops in Border Surveillance operations – which, as the name implies, was an effort to seal the borders against enemy troops and logistics infiltration. Civic Action and Psychological Operations were at best incidental to their activities.[48]

Despite this orientation, need drove Special Forces efforts with civic action and psychological operations, often in the absence of trained specialists. These efforts paid dividends, though:

> Camp dispensaries operated as clinics for local villagers and more than 90 dispensaries were established in other villages and hamlets. Between January 1963 and October 1964 USASF medics treated more than 1,500,000 patients. There were other CA activities conducted, such as land clearing for agriculture, food distribution, school supplies, building schools and a multitude of other endeavors. PSYOPS leaflets were distributed and films were shown. But the loyalty evoked was probably due far more to the face-to-face contact of the MEDCAPS and personal concern of the US Special Forces troops.[49]

Switchback and MACV's control changed the hamlet- and village-based, bottom-up approach of self-defense then development. William Colby wrote that "Army Special Forces understood this perfectly when they worked under CIA direction and implemented the concept with imagination and sensitivity. But within a few months of the November 1 effective date of *Switchback* the strategy was changed." The change to straightforward military action with strike forces against the military elements of the insurgency abandoned the hamlets and villages to "people's war."[50] Operation Switchback, to many analysts who examined it, like Douglas Blaufarb, brought about changes in orientation and effectiveness:

> The armed tribal irregulars – the so-called Citizens Irregular Defense Groups, or CIDG – were no longer a hamlet militia. Given improved training, weapons, and uniforms, and organized into companies, they became military units. As Strike Forces they were used for attack and defense against enemy units rather than as village defenders. In this role they were close to being mercenaries, something rather different from their original role and, from the viewpoint of counterinsurgency, not as useful.

Recruiting and training minority populations as the CIA had also done in Laos and would do more of in South Vietnam

> had some serious disadvantages, among them the strains it placed on an already dubious sense of national unity and the commitment of the tribes to a fight to the death against a more powerful enemy who would not give up easily.[51]

The Saigon government put in place a series of population control measures in February 1963. Measures included a family census, movement controls, and a national identification card system. These measures dovetailed, at least in theory, with the centerpiece of the Diem regime's counterinsurgency effort, the Strategic Hamlet Program. All of these matters froze in November 1963, when the Diem regime fell in a coup.

1963: a year of promise and disappointment

American Special Forces had a hand in every paramilitary program in and out of the CIDG auspices and much other training by the end of 1963. The cumulative effect of these mobilization, organizational, and training efforts was great. These efforts extended the Saigon government's influence, along with the provisions for local security and development. Colonel Morton estimated the cumulative effects of Special Forces efforts among the Montagnards in his end-of-tour debriefing.

An additional 2,587 Hamlet Militia converted to provincial control from the CIDG program through August 20 1963. These figures enumerate some 62,438 paramilitary combatants who joined the fight against the Viet Cong insurgents in less than two years of the CIDG program.[52] South Vietnam's Montagnard population was approximately 600,000 during this period. Other, non-highlander paramilitary forces like Fighting Fathers and Force Populaire elements do not appear in these estimates.[53]

Colonel Theodore Leonard assumed command of USASFV from Colonel Morton on November 7 1963. Colonel Leonard was an infantry officer with no previous special operations experience. One of his first critical decisions directed a new task organization for the SFOB in Nha Trang. Ostensibly to improve coordination with MACV, Leonard ordered the operations center – containing those assets responsible for planning, directing, and controlling tactical operations and intelligence – moved to Saigon from Nha Trang. The support center remained positioned mid-country, on the coast. This split organization lasted for the year of Colonel Leonard's tenure. His successor, Colonel John Spears, pulled his command and control assets back to Nha Trang when he took command in October 1964 of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne).[54]

Colonel Morton observed that the whole counterinsurgency strategy had to be about more than just defeating the insurgents:

> The people must be given some hope for a brighter future, or the VC can do as much for them as the government has. Land reform is urgently needed. Heads of families look for security and better prospects for their families' future and better opportunities for the education of their children. They have an elementary sense of justice, and mainly want to be left alone. The peasants in general do not think in national terms. Their level is the hamlet and the village, and it is here that the reforms must start.[55]

The principal measures supported by both the Saigon government and American assistance were what became the Strategic Hamlet Program and the continuing advisory effort that armed and equipped as well as trained and advised the ARVN. By the end of 1963 these efforts showed little return on the tremendous investment in money and manpower towards Morton's observation that most of South Vietnam wanted reform and security.

Getting on with the war in 1963 focused on defeating the VC rather than winning the rural population over to support whatever regime tried to rule from Saigon. The successes in mobilizing Montagnard then other minorities began in and centered on their communities. "The Special Forces, in effect, devoted the larger part of their effort in Vietnam," according to Blaufarb, "to a variant of standard military operations with a distinctly limited counterinsurgency function – a far cry from the role originally anticipated for them."[56]

Political considerations – to the extent they mirrored the same understanding the insurgents had that everything in a targeted population's life was subject to politicization and made part of the effort to win "them" over – fell to secondary or tertiary importance as MACV turned from hamlet and defenders to strike forces as a consideration to go after the insurgents' military forces. Even in 1963 it was horribly apparent that not securing the rural population, minority or otherwise, would lead to failure. Perceptive observers and participants saw this failure in the South Vietnamese Strategic Hamlet Program and with on-going advisory efforts.

Crisis, coup, and chaos

The Diem regime met its end on 2 November 1963. After a junta of senior officers initiated the overthrow on All Saints' Day, Diem and his brother Nhu surrendered to the Joint Staff Headquarters. The officer sent to fetch them returned with their bodies. Death by suicide – the same fate this officer met within days – ended the decade of Diemist rule in South Vietnam.[57] This story of suicide was one of the stories circulated by the new ruling junta. In fact an officer murdered Diem and his brother after they surrendered. Months of speculation and diplomatic furor had preceded the coup, variously rumored to have CIA or at least American sponsorship.

The complex crisis that began the Diem regime's last act was its handling of the Buddhist resistance and its very public method of civil disobedience, the *auto-da-fé*. Eighty percent of South Vietnam's population was Buddhist. Spread across the country, the repression and raids on pagodas (as in well-publicized raids carried out by Nhu's Vietnamese Special Forces in Hue) provoked many regime opponents. These acts of repression were also characteristic of the Diem regime's harsh measures against all manner of its opponents, religious and political.[58]

The new junta headed by General Duong Van Minh would prove unprepared either to counter the insurgents or to govern. The officers in the junta were remnants of the army of the French Union. Almost all of the new, senior military leaders had been in service since the days of the French and had served as nationalists, but in power "they found they had nothing to offer the people of the villages and the city streets. Of more immediate consequence, they found that the war was being lost."[59]

The actual coup also caught the insurgents and their northern sponsors off guard. In the quiet of the following weeks, Radio Liberation first beamed updated policies towards the south on November 7 1963, calling for the destruction of all strategic hamlets, release of political prisoners, and other measures aimed at destabilization of the junta like expelling the Americans. There was also the judgement that perhaps victory in the south was nearer than supposed.[60] As 1963 drew to a close, there was little difference at the CIDG and border camps strewn across South Vietnam: strengthening camp defenses and looking for ways to improve the material lot of the camp's extended families with civic action or micro-development projects during the day and combat patrolling and ambushes at night. Their camps would assimilate into the Strategic Hamlet Program and recruiters would seek single men for the ARVN or self-defense forces.

6 Threatened hamlets and bad advice

Two efforts carried the weight of the counterinsurgent response, excepting the CIDG program. The first was the Strategic Hamlet Program, the supposed centerpiece of combined counterinsurgency. The second program expanded almost a decade of advisory efforts to help the ARVN fight the "real war."[1] American and Vietnamese leaders, political and military, could look back from the end of 1963 to contrast two years of two very different approaches to defeating the insurgency. An enormous number of "completed" strategic hamlets supported – at least on paper – a stable rural population increasingly put at arm's length from the insurgents. Under the direction of South Vietnamese district and provincial leaders, American assistance from various agencies flowed to the hamlet and village level. The main effort of the ARVN and its American advisors attacked the VC military forces. Unable to rely on traditional military measures of effectiveness like terrain seized or armies defeated, Saigon's leaders and MACV counted weapons recovered (as well as weapons lost) and enemy casualties, often extrapolated from blood trails or the grim remains of a body in black pajamas.

Insurgent military formations reconstituted and formed new ones. Leaders in Saigon and Washington also saw the apparent insecurity of the strategic hamlets as the thin reed of Diemist assertions of success snapped in a steady breeze of Viet Cong/National Liberation Front subversion and clandestine political development. Despite a sustained military and offensive strategy, success proved elusive, helping bring about the coup that removed Diem in November 1963.

Strategic hamlets

South Vietnamese efforts in village-based counterinsurgency like the Strategic Hamlet Program, though successful on paper, not only failed, but actually accelerated the crisis in rural South Vietnam. The Strategic Hamlet Program violated peasant trust, and created tensions with relocations and *corvée* labor for public works and defenses, as well as and providing more

security problems. The program set as its goal ultimately to have 90 percent of rural South Vietnam's population settled in government-fortified and developed hamlets. Interim objectives of this program included security from VC mobilization efforts, economic development, and political indoctrination through developing an awareness of democratic values. With a nod to indigenous programs tried in 1959, Saigon's efforts mirrored British programs in Malaysia and followed the advice of Sir Robert Thompson, since 1962 the head of the British Advisory Mission in Saigon.

Precedents

The Strategic Hamlet Program was the principal counterinsurgency element of the combined operations.[2] Promulgated by a National Security Council Action Memorandum in August 1961, the program built, in theory, on the lessons learned from Diem's less-than-successful *agroville* experiments.[3] *Agrovilles* began in 1959 and ran into 1961 before their collapse. This program was an ambitious undertaking to concentrate rural populations for economic development and control. Joseph Zasloff, a former administrator with the Michigan State University advisory group, quoted President Diem's words from a radio address that promised southern peasants that he would "create *densely populated settlement areas* in the countryside, where conditions are favorable to communication and sanitation and where minimum facilities for the grouping of the farmers living in isolation and destitution in the back country exist." Based on relocation, *corvée* labor, and without any legitimate land reform, *agrovilles* were not well received or successful. Propaganda efforts by the Diem regime could not overcome the program's shortcomings or the very real resentment felt by the peasants, who bore the weight of the labor, and the uncertainty, and then found themselves targeted by insurgent mobilization efforts with propaganda and more.[4]

More is only more

Increases in American assistance to Diem's regime followed the joint American–South Vietnamese decision to devote attention and resources to initiatives other than military or economic ones. The centerpiece of the Diem government's counterinsurgency became strategic hamlets, *ap chien luoc*. This program followed the poorly conceived *agrovilles* initiative. *Agrovilles* – intended to spur rural economic development and integration while providing some measure of local security – did not fare well. Strategic hamlets, together with the efforts of American Special Forces with the Montagnards and other minorities, faced the insurgents and their North Vietnamese supporters in the "special war." South Vietnamese plans called for a total of 11,000 strategic hamlets amalgamated from 14,000 rural hamlets. Peasants again would provide labor and receive economic assistance

for construction of houses and common structures like wells and schools, as well as reorganized, local defense measures. William J. Duiker, historian and former Foreign Service officer in Vietnam, wrote of a "dialectic of escalation" that began during Kennedy's administration as the pressure of American assistance spread into rural, contested areas.[5]

Initial Strategic Hamlet Program efforts in early 1962 pleased the South Vietnamese and the Americans while it dismayed the insurgents. State Department message traffic found the program "on the right track" in April 1962. The insurgents found themselves cut off from some rural populations and their rice by "a network of outposts and strong points and a web of roads, airfields, and 'strategic hamlets.' "[6] Increased ARVN military operations accompanied hamlet development efforts. Often in the opening phase within a given district, ARVN units swept areas looking for guerrilla military elements or bases. American helicopters increased ARVN mobility. Recent decisions to push US Army and Marine Corps advisors down to battalion levels seemed to improve combat effectiveness. Insurgents found themselves separated from some elements of the peasant population and wrestled with measures to deal with the changed rural situation. As insurgent military units demonstrated new tactics and resolve in dealing with helicopters and armored personnel carriers in battles like Ap Bac in January 1963, lower-profile infiltration and organizational tactics took their toll in many strategic hamlets.

In conjunction with the advice of Sir Robert Thompson of the British Advisory Mission in Saigon, the Strategic Hamlet Program tried to overcome the shortcomings of earlier, rural-based population control and development schemes. Enhanced Regional and Popular Forces (RF/PF) – the renamed Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps – provided security to cut resettled peasant populations off from the insurgents. Fortifying existing villages would provide improved bases for gradual extension of government authority throughout enemy-controlled territory. By phase, the American plan called for securing the provinces around Saigon first (Operation Sunrise) in 1962. The second phase planned to secure the Delta area and Central Highlands in 1963 and the remainder of the country in 1964.[7]

Actual execution of the program challenged several South Vietnamese and American assumptions. Could the RF/PF maintain local security? These security forces proved helpful to the insurgents in two respects. "They served as a source of weapons; and their brutality, petty thievery, and disorderliness induced innumerable villagers to join in open revolt against the government of Vietnam."[8] Another assumption involved the clean-up of civilian and military corruption in provincial administration. These reforms had to take place before critically needed land reform could occur in pacified areas. Few effective, honest Vietnamese civic action teams made it into the field. "Civic action is not the construction of privies or the distribution of antimalaria sprays," Bernard Fall concluded: "one can't fight a militant doctrine with better privies."[9]

Sir Robert Thompson recommended strengthening population control measures to deny insurgents access to the peasants. This recommendation found instant approval with the Diem regime. Headed by Diem's brother Nhu, these control efforts resulted in repression at the village level, further alienating target populations.[10] Republican Youth and Biet Cach, favorites of Nhu, were programs that targeted rice-roots level organization for pro-government political indoctrination. The American plan reflected a concentration on using hamlets for secure bases to free ARVN forces for missions aimed at destroying guerrilla main-force units. Adopting a compromise plan, Diem ordered offensive operations to sweep the jungles for guerrillas. The hamlets were at the mercy of ineffectual RF/PF security.

An initial area selected for the pilot program, Operation Sunrise, was in the heart of Viet Cong/National Liberation Front-controlled territory near Saigon. One State Department assessment found that key South Vietnamese leaders "tend[ed] to place exaggerated importance on the program, viewing it almost as a universal panacea to the Communist insurgency rather than merely a measure for cutting off the Viet Cong from the peasantry."[11] One CIA assessment of the program found no overall plan to integrate village, district, and provincial defenses. Vulnerability varied considerably. As for finding and fighting the guerrillas, operations were too large to maintain operational security and surprise. ARVN commanders, the report surmised, did not possess sufficient tactical flexibility and imagination to engage the enemy.[12]

Making the dog hunt

First, the ARVN executed a "clear and hold" operation in an area targeted for a strategic hamlet. This was literally to clear insurgents from the area of interest and establish initial security. While maintaining local security, fortification and civic action activities were initiated. Hamlet-based militia members received training and equipment and villagers built defenses while local intelligence activities began. At the same time pro-government political education and indoctrination also took place. After the strategic hamlet became operational, US Operations Mission representatives visited and provided monetary assistance to support civic action. Often hamlets opted for construction of wells, schools, and bridges as representatives of different agencies appeared from Saigon.[13]

The Saigon government aggressively pursued this program, but results, while numerically impressive, failed to add to meaningful government influence in the countryside by mid-1963. In the heavily populated Delta region south of Saigon in the IV Corps area, "the [Strategic Hamlet] program suffered serious reverses in many provinces, [and] is in effect at a standstill in others and moving ahead slowly in only a few."[14]

In the III Corps area, surrounding Saigon and stretching north, the Strategic Hamlet Program made slow progress. Colonel Morton commented

an the possibility of "rapid progress in the provinces of Binh Duong, Tay Ninh, and Phuoc Thanh, where the VC have long been entrenched, "and assessed that" pacifying this area is a project of several years' duration." The II Corps area, north of Saigon, had no more than 50 percent of its hamlets. In I Corps, the northernmost corps area, friction between the government and Buddhists hampered the program. Despite the success of civic action measures including agricultural efforts and school construction, "a dangerous vacuum in acceptable political leadership has been created at the central and possibly provincial government levels."[15]

Assessments and measures of effectiveness

Sir Robert Thompson often reported to President Diem on actual conditions in the program. In September 1963 he appraised President Diem that establishment of hamlets had gone too rapidly and that there was "a consequent dispersal of effort and a scattering of hamlets over too wide an area." From the beginning in July 1962 until the end of August 1963 the reported progress showed an increase from 2,559 hamlets to a total of 8,095. Support for security and suppression of insurgent activities had not kept pace with the rush of activities or with the requirement to prepare the way with psychological operations to help shape attitudes and development projects to improve the lot of life in rural South Vietnam. Further, there were severe problems with coordination between provincial officials and ARVN commanders with regard to support for often half-trained and poorly equipped paramilitaries to whom the burden for defending vulnerable outposts and hamlets soon fell.[16]

The commander of US Army Special Forces (Vietnam), Colonel George Morton, had watched the Strategic Hamlet Program from its beginnings. Special Forces detachments under his command mobilized and trained Montagnards to defend their hamlets and villages at the same time as civic action projects and psychological operations helped to influence wary Montagnards to support the government's resistance to the insurgency. Colonel Morton's critique of the Strategic Hamlet Program identified themes of success and failure. Effective leadership was the critical, common component of success:

> There is still an acute need for more effective and devoted local leaders who understand the fundamental principles of the program; above all for leaders who understand that popular support is absolutely essential to its success, as well as being its main objective. Where the program has been successful, this has been reflected in an emphasis upon quality (meaning popular enthusiasm) rather than *quantity* in the construction of hamlets.

Weakness often resulted from security shortfalls, "the failure to integrate hamlet defense intelligently into military planning. Too many VC units

of significant strength, at times company size or larger, seemed to attack individual hamlets almost at will.'' The lack of adequate, rehearsed defensive plans for the individual hamlets aggravated weaknesses in village and district defensive planning. Hamlet residents became discouraged and the program lost most of its psychological value.[17]

Colonel Morton also found the Strategic Hamlet Program generally suffered from its rapid growth. The expanded and accelerated program precluded detailed planning and effective execution. Progress required continuing development efforts for the hamlets to win popular support. Saigon's attempts to isolate the rural population from the insurgents was ambivalent or worse, especially with resettlement of targeted communities. Once again, Colonel Morton observed:

> The isolation technique of resettlement has strong and weak points. Its strength lies that it gets people into controlled communities, making it easier to deny VC contacts. But, if improperly handled, the VC can gain control. In Montagnard areas, pulling out the Montagnards for resettlement gives the VC a free hand in the area.[18]

Hamlets developed inconsistently. Often repressively administered, without associated reforms and effective security, the Strategic Hamlet Program did little to pacify the countryside. Military Assistance Command Vietnam focused on the guerrilla war. Historian Andrew Krepinevich found that ''MACV's position was to support the Strategic Hamlets program, provided it did not interfere with the broader role MACV had set for the ARVN – conducting offensive operations designed to destroy VC forces.''[19]

Other studies of the insurgency at village level concluded that the Strategic Hamlet Program could only fail. Jeffrey Race, a former US Army advisor in the Delta, found that both the *agroville* initiative and Strategic Hamlet Program as ''government programs that might have alleviated the situation [security and development challenges] to some extent were cast aside in favor of programs that aggravated it and increased sympathy for the revolutionary movement.'' Based on a cold calculus of benefit, rural populations sided with the insurgents or hunkered down as the skirmishes swept back and forth over their homes and fields.[20] Historian Eric Bergerud found that the concept of strategic hamlets threatened insurgent efforts. But the program failed in execution because of the burden of conscripted labor, poor leadership, and the Saigon regime's inability to follow through with either effective security or development promises.[21]

Other voices in the national security chorus also raised this alarm, even from Washington. Roger Hilsman addressed the difficulties in assessment for the State Department in *And How Do You Know If You're Winning?* in 1963. With the ARVN defeat at Ap Bac and the almost successful assault on the Special Forces camp at Plei Mrong in January, the orientation towards the military challenges of the insurgency had not benefitted from

increases in either firepower or mobility. Hilsman discussed – briefly in *To Move a Nation* but in depth in other correspondence – the need for measures of effectiveness to assess progress or failure. Insurgent-initiated attacks and incidents decreased 55 percent from mid-1962 through mid-1963. Concomitantly casualties also fell for both insurgents and South Vietnamese, respectively 46 percent and 52 percent. Weapons losses for both sides also declined, 20 percent and 28 percent respectively. Insurgent defections, perhaps tellingly, declined to 8 percent of the previous year's figures.[22] These trends changed in June 1963 as the turbulence surrounding Buddhist protests swirled around both the Diem regime and its well-publicized repression.

Hilsman singled out the Strategic Hamlet Program for criticism. Despite the rhetorical commitment to local security and development, serious discrepancies existed between reported successes and the ground truth. "The implication," Hilsman found,

> is either that the Viet Cong have infiltrated a large number of established hamlets because of the failure of the GVN [Government of Vietnam] to protect them, or that the province chiefs under the old regime reported as completed hamlets which did not meet the criteria of the strategic hamlet program.

Hilsman cited the situation in Long An province, near Saigon, where only forty-five of the 219 reported hamlets were secure.[23] Quoting at length from a memorandum he prepared for the State Department, Hilsman concluded that the Diem regime looked on the program

> as a panacea, and there is still considerable confusion among local officials as to the objectives of the program and the procedures for implementing it .... [S]trategic hamlets have been, and still are, being thrown together in the absence of a coordinated pacification effort, such as conceived in the Delta plan, and with only perfunctory attention to defense and socio-economic administrative improvements .... GVN failure to emphasize political, social, and economic reform at the outset may deprive the entire effort of much of its impact. Much depends on the ability of the Government to show convincing evidence of its intent to improve the lot of the peasants. Instead, Government efforts appear to be aimed largely at increasing Government control over the peasants.[24]

One contemporary report prepared for the Special Operations Research Office found slow progress "has resulted principally from a lack of clear-cut policies, serious administrative and procedural deficiencies in the provincial apparatus and a lack of coordination of effort between the military and civilian authorities and between the ministries." Additional challenges that came from attempts to separate the pacification challenge from that of

the counter-guerrilla struggle highlighted problems with the abilities and experience of administrators at district and province level:

> The absorptive capacity and quality limitations of provincial administrators, the inability to detect and destroy the Viet Cong infrastructure, the understrength police forces and the marginally effective intelligence services are the chief obstacles. Moreover problems have resulted from poorly trained and motivated cadre, improper organization and planning, inadequate military forces under the direct control of province chiefs, and by officials not understanding or following the oil spot technique. Perhaps the greatest obstacle, however, has been the deteriorating security situation as the mobile force ratios and motivation differential have changed in favor of the VC.[25]

After the November coup Hilsman expressed the dismay of much of Kennedy's administration at the newly discovered paucity of progress from the Strategic Hamlet Program: "the statistics on the number of strategic hamlets and on the number of villages under effective government control were completely false." Hilsman provided a qualification of the inaccuracy of previous reports. " 'Ah, les statistiques!' " Hilsman quoted one of the putschist generals: " 'your Secretary of Defense loves statistics. We Vietnamese can give him all he wants. If you want them to go up, they will go up. If you want them to go down, they will go down.' "[26]

South Vietnamese official enthusiasm for local development and security – especially as a source of American aid – did not match the RVN's ability to execute the ambitious plans called for by the Strategic Hamlets Program. Lack of qualified, honest district – and provincial-level officials made administration of this program problematic. Peasants resented labor drafts as well as the insensitivity of officials to local concerns like appointment of village officials rather than continuing their traditional election.[27]

Corruption went hand-in-hand with administrative ineptitude or sloth. South Vietnamese army units soon returned to their garrisons or moved offensive operations to other areas. Favoritism also served as a drag on local acceptance. Merchants or land owners known to favor Nhu's personalism received favorable consideration in access to American aid or contracts supporting hamlet-based initiatives. Training and resources for local security forces largely failed to materialize. There was no secure foundation of administration, development, or safety upon which to construct this critical program. Only 1,500 of 8,500 strategic hamlets were secure and developing in 1963.[28]

Insurgents, drawing on their organizational base, returned to target centers of influence like teachers and mayors, often with gruesome results. Keeping an operational focus at the village- and hamlet-level also allowed the insurgents to exploit both themes of social action and nationalism

embedded in rural reform and reliance on American assistance.[29] "In short, every unscrupulous and inefficient characteristic of the Diem regime," according to Bergerud, "was emphasized and amplified by the Strategic Hamlet Program. The aggressive policy intended to save Diem, was, in reality, hastening his end."[30]

Jeffery Race found that, for South Vietnam, " 'victory in the rural areas' meant achieving a decisive superiority in the balance of forces at the village and hamlet levels, the only units of social and geographical significance to the rural Vietnamese." The very condition for national victory required establishing control of most of the 12,000 hamlets south of the 17th parallel, either by Diem's regime or by the insurgents. "It is extremely significant that most of these victories were obtained," Race concluded,

> not during the military phase, but rather during the pre-military phase of intense political activity to establish balance of social forces (in ordinary language, the winning of popular sympathy for a just cause). Once this had been accomplished, it generally took only the threat of violence to cause the local government apparatus to collapse.[31]

American advice and support favored military efforts but nowhere did it include one word about the conditions in Vietnamese society that permitted the relatively unhindered mobility of the revolutionary forces that permitted the in-place political apparatus to do its work, or even to exist.[32]

Other analysts have examined the Strategic Hamlet Program. Robert W. Komer served in several posts of influence from Kennedy's National Security Council staff to directing pacification efforts in Vietnam, ultimately heading the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS). "Despite US urging," Komer concluded, "it [SHP] failed to gear up politically, militarily, economically, or administratively to meet the needs it increasingly recognized." Diem's regime attempted to meet the insurgency after defeating the sects and while it also attempted to launch development and modernization schemes coupled with Nhu's personalism. Komer made a negative assessment of these responses:

> The GVN launched a plethora of programs, but built no adequate administrative machinery to carry them out. It made all too little effort to compete with the Viet Cong in the vital countryside, until the belated Strategic Hamlet Program of 1962–1963. And this too failed largely for administrative reasons; all too much of it remained on paper.[33]

Douglas Blaufarb examined American-backed experimentation with counterinsurgency techniques in South Vietnam. Blaufarb characterized the Strategic Hamlet Program "as a transfer of Malayan experience to Vietnam through the persuasion of the British Advisory Mission and particularly R. K. G. Thompson." Blaufarb also commented on the CIA-sponsored

experiment that took place in Vietnam's Central Highlands, by way of comparison.

> In a little more than thirteen months some thirty-eight thousand tribesmen were armed and over two hundred villages were incorporated into the scheme with a population of about three hundred thousand. The inducement for the tribespeople was self-protection against the Viet Cong together with such programs as training for medical aides, dispensaries, education, and similar small-scale improvements in their lives.[34]

This successful experiment was the CIDG program. Its success notwithstanding, as control of the program shifted from the CIA to MACV, hamlet defenders faced assimilation into the ARVN as others faced disarmament when village defense elements transferred to South Vietnamese control.[35] Blaufarb found SHP deficient. "The program moved much too quickly under the whip of Ngo Dinh Nhu," Blaufarb concluded,

> leading to gross failures of implementation. Among the results were falsified statistics and claims that the criteria for a completed hamlet had been met when, in fact, all that had been done was to throw up a fence or dig a moat.[36]

Empty hamlets

Diem's overthrow revealed that his regime's centerpiece counterinsurgency program had only a thin veneer of effectiveness. "A rapid loss of pacified population and hamlets to the VC followed the 1 November 1963 coup," read one Special Operations Research Office contemporary analysis of counterinsurgency programs in South Vietnam. This report continued:

> up to that time the pacification program which had been soundly conceived under the Diem Regime, appeared to be making progress. In fact, however, this progress was more statistical than real. Poor administration of the program was alienating rather than winning the population.[37]

Diem's regime could not execute village-based efforts, despite the effectiveness of these techniques in Malaysia and South Vietnam's Central Highlands. Inadequate metrics collected without scrutiny further obscured SHP's shortcomings. Hamlets were empty of support for the Saigon regime as well as poorly defended by local defense forces and the American-advised Army of the Republic of Vietnam. Assistance to local defense forces suffered from neglect until later in the war, but the ARVN had received the assistance, attention, and advice of the Americans since the beginning of the new republic.

Advisors

Beginnings

Beginning in 1955 the Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam (MAAG) began to create the ARVN closely paralleling the United States Army force structure of the period. A period of tumult followed the negotiated armistice in Geneva. French forces and advisors remained in Vietnam. General J. Lawton Collins became the special envoy to Saigon to coordinate a transition of assistance and advice. A combined Franco-American Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM), headed by Lieutenant General John W. ''Iron Mike'' O'Daniel – the chief of the MAAG – began to sort out staff organization, training, logistics, and the host of matters related to defense from the ministerial level to the squad room. When the French Expeditionary Corps left Vietnam in April 1956, TRIM gave way to the American MAAG and an increase in US advisors. The Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) in 1956 oversaw the transition to US supply and logistics procedures.[38]

Seven divisions organized into three army corps comprised the ARVN by 1960. Tables of organization and equipment grew out of local tests, but ARVN units very much reflected US design and doctrine. Local paramilitary units were explicitly not part of this advisory effort. The strategic focus of the ARVN was defense against an external invasion.[39] This ''mirror imaging'' followed the recent historical experience of the Army advising first a constabulary then an army in Korea. Reinforcing this experience was the generalized assumption that the ARVN would enhance internal security.[40]

Advisors to the ARVN were on eleven-month ''hardship'' tours in Vietnam until mid-1962. Largely untrained in the Vietnamese language and with little orientation to Vietnamese culture or history, the advisors trained and inculcated indigenous counterparts and troops in US Army doctrine and against communism.[41] Advisors rarely accompanied their assigned units to the field and assignments stopped at the brigade level. Of this period, Fall wrote, ''it is not without significance that the MAAG commanders, as professional senior soldiers used to the movement and training of conventional armies but unacquainted with revolutionary war, were consistently more optimistic than any other group.''[42] The lower the rank of an advisor and the further from Saigon or a provincial capital, the closer he and his counterpart were likely to be. Advising involved much effort, cajoling, convincing, or persuading the counterpart – usually through an interpreter – to put out security or not let the men steal a peasant's chicken.[43]

The nature of the French colonial experience to limit Vietnamese authority and responsibility affected the American effort to grow military leaders. Leadership and managerial training programs began and continued both in Vietnam and in the United States for ARVN leaders. As the insurgency

sharpened, though, training opportunities and requirements clashed with tactical and operational requirements in individual and collective training.[44]

Advisory activities with the ARVN expanded in 1962 to include the redesignated Regional and Popular Forces from Hamlet Militia and Self-Defense Corps. The concept of operations called for enhancement of the security forces (transferred to the National Defense Ministry) to free up ARVN units for offensive, counter-guerrilla missions.[45] An examination of the distribution of advisors and resources shows, however, that the ARVN continued to get the lion's share of support.[46] The number of advisors increased, above the Geneva Accord ceilings, to place Americans in ARVN units down to the battalion level in 1963.[47] These advisors increasingly helped their Vietnamese counterparts assimilate contemporary American technology in the forms of armored personnel carriers and helicopters. These twin developments grew out of the maneuver-minded, offense-oriented US Army doctrine that emerged from the 1950s. A combat test for men, leadership, equipment, and doctrine, came in early 1963.

Ap Bac

In January 1963 elements of the ARVN's 7th Division clashed with elements of two Viet Cong battalions near the village of Ap Bac. Making good use of the terrain and previously captured heavy machine guns, the insurgents withstood repeated assaults by elements of a regular ARVN infantry battalion, two Regional Force battalions, and a mechanized infantry company mounted in M113 armored personnel carriers. Helicopters, artillery, and close air support (CAS) supported the government operation. The insurgent battalion managed to hold out and inflict over two hundred friendly casualties. Elements of this guerrilla battalion shot down five helicopters and withdrew in good order that night.[48] It was a fiasco of the first order for the ARVN and MACV. General Harkins, though, claimed victory for MACV's efforts: "I am convinced we have taken the military, psychological, economic, and political initiative from the enemy."[49]

The two insurgent companies that opposed the ARVN attack were from a local, provincial battalion and a main force VC battalion. Together these units took advantage of the increases in firepower afforded North Vietnamese units during the PAVN's reorganization and refitting of the previous several years. The density of automatic weapons had increased as had the understanding in their employment. Rocket-propelled grenades were also part of the basic issue. After dark fell, the survivors of the day-long ARVN attack withdrew in good order.[50]

Military and offensive

What the US Army taught the ARVN was consistent with doctrinal assumptions dating to the interwar period, little changed by World War Two

or Korean War experiences. American tactical and operational doctrine distilled to find, fix, and fight into a constant message of firepower and maneuver. Political and ethnic considerations incorporating revolutionary or post-colonial realizations, service constabulary experiences from the American West through the subjugation of the Philippines, pacification of Cuba, or vicarious US Marine Corps experiences in the Caribbean or Central America were absent. "During the decade before direct US intervention," concluded Robert Komer:

> all too little military attention had been paid to the special circumstances of Vietnam. Influenced by the Korean War (and largely neglecting both French experience in Indochina and British experience in Malaya), the US put the bulk of its military aid and advice into building a conventional ARVN ill suited to the challenges it faced.[51]

Army of the Republic of Vietnam units seldom found, fixed, fought or finished the guerrillas. Launching sorties out of main, base camps, frequently along the trails and roads, the guerrillas targeted government units for frequent ambushes.[52] Effective Viet Cong intelligence networks helped deprive the ARVN of surprise. To keep the initiative and maximize their minimal firepower, guerrillas generally fought those engagements they felt they could win. Seldom surprised, these units would go to ground if faced with unfavorable odds. Breaking contact under cover of darkness, guerrillas stole away from ARVN units willing to cede the enemy the night. Village security outposts fell frequently to violent night assaults yielding both arms and victories.[53]

Since the Viet Cong targeted peasant populations for their propaganda efforts, villages and hamlets attracted government patrols and operations. In support of operations, increased use of artillery and close air support began to inflict indiscriminate damage in areas of operations.[54] Poor Vietnamese leadership and the objective of defeating guerrillas rather than winning over the peasants virtually insured civilian casualties and collateral damage. Poor leadership resulted from the politicization and corruption of the officer corps. This did not change the military operational focus.[55]

Army of the Republic of Vietnam operations changed as increases in American advisors and new equipment began to influence events. One contemporary report found: "an important improvement in capability realized during the past year over 1963 is the sizeable increase in the amount of artillery and air firepower now available." But it also found that these changes were not an unalloyed blessing:

> two negative trends have been noted. Many ground unit commanders and outpost and hamlet defenders now employ artillery and air fires to the exclusion of close combat. Also, because of the distrust as to accuracy, supporting fires are not brought in close enough to be of

> optimum effectiveness. The other negative result is caused by the first. When RVNAF (Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces) troops observed more dependence being placed on supporting fires their aggressiveness and motivation to close with the VC deteriorated. In contrast, the VC found that the best way to escape the supporting fires was to maintain close contact. Success in this tactic gave rise to an increased aggressiveness and motivation on the part of the VC to engage in close combat, the closer the better.[56]

This adaptive dialectic came with an increased operational tempo as both the ARVN and the paramilitary forces of the CIDG increased offensive actions. ''What we did in Vietnam cannot be fully understood,'' wrote Komer,

> unless it is seen as a function of our playing out our military repertoire – doing what we were most capable and experienced at doing. Such institutional constraints as the very way our general purpose forces were trained, equipped, and structured largely dictated our response.[57]

Almost ten years of military advice and support had shaped the ARVN by the time of the Diem coup. The Center for Military History's treatment of these efforts found:

> Although it encompassed the totality of Saigon's armed forces, its effectiveness in molding that force was in no way commensurate with the size and scope of its actual power. Neither the US ambassador nor the MACV commander, for example, had been able to use his control over the South Vietnamese military budget to limit the involvement of armed forces in the national politics.[58]

The view from the American embassy in Saigon, or in Washington, was that South Vietnam needed

> a strong military leader to stop the alarming succession of defeats and to halt the general demoralization of the army. In their view the Vietnamese ought to wait until the Communist threat had passed before they indulged, as Lodge [the ambassador] said, in the ''luxury'' of politics.[59]

Strong leadership meant military leadership. The French-educated, American-military-schooled senior ARVN officers were best known to senior Americans in Saigon. This de facto definition reflected the predominance of military assistance by 1963 as well as a virtual militarization of the inherently complex counterinsurgency efforts. ''The simple fact that most of the war effort was financed by relatively unfungible US defense appropriations,'' Robert Komer has written about MACV,

> reinforced [MACV's] predominance, though Secretary McNamara and the author were ingenious in finding ways in which Department of Defense funds could do double duty by also supporting pacification and anti-inflation measures. Moreover, the military field was about the only major area where the US thought it could get results commensurate with its investment, because we were providing so much that Diem and his generals wanted.[60]

Militarization grew from the momentum of the expanded advisory effort as well. Was it possible to assess if this support and assistance was effective?

Measures of effectiveness: counting the costs

Measurement of military potential, threats, and vulnerabilities is as old as war itself. The processes for this "net assessment" vary and are complex. Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett devoted an edited volume to the subject from a national-level perspective. The process of net assessment involves friendly and enemy or potential enemy elements across a range of factors that may include technology and equipment, force structure and organization, doctrine and training, as well as leadership, attitudes, and motivation. Some of these elements and their measurement are problematic, crossing not only the boundaries of official classification but cultural nuance and simple accessibility as well.[61] Murray and Millett also explored the related topic of broad-ranged effectiveness in the three-volume *Military Effectiveness*. The analysis of effectiveness, applied to the case studies that dealt with World War One, the interwar period, and World War Two, focused on wider definitions rather than assessing the effects on enemy action.

The complex nature of measurement and metrics is inescapable in net assessment and judging military effectiveness. "One must include in the analysis," Murray and Millett wrote in "The Effectiveness of Military Organizations" that introduced their three volumes,

> non-quantifiable organizational attitudes, behaviors, and relationships that span a military organization's full activities at the political, strategic, operational, and tactical levels. A more limited method of assessment only provides equally limited conclusions.[62]

Measures of effectiveness or metrics gathered in the period leading up the November 1963 coup obscured as much as they illuminated. To assess progress or failure in countering the insurgency, Saigon and Washington looked at an overwhelmingly military group of indicators. The numbers of incidents, attacks – ranging up in size from squad to company – and casualties as well as weapons and defections tallied up into an accounting of the war.

Recently declassified materials from the National Security Archive referred to the general problems of assessment and evaluation. Looking back at 1963 and the coup, an evaluation of the situation in South Vietnam found that "Diem's regime had given false or inaccurate reports that made matters seem better than was actually the case."[63] MACV's sorts of numbers measured outcomes but provided only a superficial appreciation of the struggle with the insurgents. Casualty figures and weapons lost or captured may have been appropriate for the counter-guerrilla fight, but they proved inadequate for any meaningful assessment of the counterinsurgency.

Diem's regime attempted to meet the insurgency after defeating the sects and while it also attempted to launch development and modernization schemes coupled with Nhu's personalism. Komer's assessment of these responses was negative:

> The GVN launched a plethora of programs, but built no adequate administrative machinery to carry them out. It made all too little effort to compete with the Viet Cong in the vital countryside, until the belated Strategic Hamlet Program of 1962–1963. And this too failed largely for administrative reasons; all too much of it remained on paper.[64]

Metrics and cognitive dominance

For the military organization involved in a counterinsurgency small war, achieving pacification of a contested village would be an example of a value metric. The knowledge elements – components of data and information that enable action – of this measured value would include the extent to which the village and its populations can participate in their collective and individual activities – self-defense, education, tax collection – reinforcing the government's position of authority and legitimacy. Process metrics that support this value proposition of a "free" village would include numbers of schools open and functioning, numbers of markets and other collective commercial endeavors, political measures of participation like voting, non-coerced attendance at public meetings, and tax compliance. Success indicators would be numbers of participants and indicate the extent to which the insurgents did not have access to or sway over contested populations.[65]

Knowledge is a catalyst for action. Knowledge development and use require measurement indicators or metrics to assess costs, calculate return on investment, and help demonstrate success. Knowledge can be a source of sustainable advantage if maintained and sustained. Appropriate metrics can demonstrate this sustainable advantage. Not just tying suppliers to clients or buyers to sellers or in rushing the better mousetrap to market, knowledge can also include the application of tactical acumen with rigorously trained troops, sure and well-practiced with their combat systems to accomplish their objectives or defeat their foes. At any rate the measured outcomes of the CIDG program, trained hamlet and village defenders – enumerated

by hamlet by village by area development center or CIDG camp – as well as the civic action and psychological operations efforts supporting mobilization, when taken together with the type and number of contacts with the insurgents, provided a much more useful and nuanced picture of the struggle with insurgents.

7 Operational innovation, institutional failure

US Army Special Forces gained in the Montagnards the sturdy allies they needed to reduce the vulnerability of the Central Highlands. Defended villages and hamlet complexes extended limited control and legitimacy for the Saigon regime into strategically significant regions of South Vietnam. In the absence of counter*insurgen*cy doctrine' Special Forces soldiers applied their unconventional warfare background and training to missions assigned and implied. Special Forces soldiers turned the Montagnards into resistance groups in this small war. The US Army's doctrine had a counter-*guerrilla* focus. This critical realization and execution demonstrated cognitive dominance: a realization of the actual terms of engagement and subsequent organization for mission accomplishment. The operational focus was defensive and political from the initial Special Forces mobilization of the Rhade communities around Buon Enao until MACV reoriented the Civilian Irregular Defense Program, first, towards offensive operations and border surveillance in 1963. Taken together, these elements constituted an operational innovation in counterinsurgency. It would take the trauma of 1968's Tet offensive and another change of command at MACV to bring about a return to appreciating the strategic importance of secure villages and hamlets in South Vietnam.

Both insurgents and counterinsurgents sought the loyalties and support of the Montagnard communities. Overwhelmingly this target population stood up behind the efforts of American Special Forces. The program in the Central Highlands was initially so successful that a half dozen other paramilitary missions became the responsibility of US Army Special Forces (Provisional), Vietnam. Accepting the special position of the Montagnards and their particular issues with assimilation, issues related to mobilizing their communities read across to the larger Vietnamese rural society. Successful – and unsuccessful – techniques offered critical information with respect to countering the insurgency.

The Montagnards found respect in their relationships with the American Special Forces that rarely came about in dealings between highlanders and ethnic Vietnamese. "Nationalism is the belief in the historic rights, wrongs, hatreds, and mission of one's own ethnic-linguistic *group*," wrote

MacGregor Knox on the interaction of strategy and systems of belief, "and in individual self-realization through subordination to that group."[1] In return for their self-interested participation in village defense – which became first the Village Defense Program and ultimately part of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program – Montagnards regained not just weapons but the means to maintain and enhance their autonomy at a time when the depredations of Vietnamese, from the north and south, endangered their way of life. This Montagnard engagement fueled ethnic nationalism at the same time as it provided an avenue for development.

Civic action projects that accompanied the other efforts of Special Forces helped improve the Montagnard way of life without abandoning traditional practices. Village-based market opportunities, improved agricultural strains, and engineering developments like wells and road improvement, as well as health clinic and health workers, all provided readily recognizable improvements to quality of life. The operational focus had been defensive and political. Despite the success of efforts of mobilize Montagnard communities, the successful adaptation-turned-innovation of US Army Special Forces went unappreciated. Failing to understand the capabilities and limitations provided by this applied counterinsurgency helped make the Second Indochina War the American war. The missed limitation of this successful counterinsurgency was that success seemed to require Americans for the execution and sustainment, at the stupendous risk of changing the war into an American affair.

Mobilized Montagnard communities focused their loyalty and respect on the Americans sharing their lives and dangers. South Vietnamese military and civilian elements proved unable or unwilling to integrate newly secured Montagnard villages and hamlets from the first successes of the Village Defense Program through the mostly unsuccessful camp turnovers with their planned provincial administrative governance. As South Vietnamese shortcomings became more pronounced, resentment grew among the Montagnards. Americans, civilian and military, failed to appreciate that these limitations meant that hopes to make counterinsurgency programs self-sustaining by the South Vietnamese would go unfulfilled. The insurgents managed to paint Diem and all subsequent juntas and regimes as tools of the Americans. What could have been successful only as a Vietnamese war became an American one.

Does the element of the centrality of the American role in minority mobilization create a problem in attempting to extrapolate prospects for broader success from the CIDG example? The answer is a qualified "no." Counterinsurgency efforts writ large have to address grievances real and imagined. Inequities in the fledgling Republic of South Vietnam were real. The well of distaste for the Montagnards went deep, as did the shared understanding of enmity on the part of the highland peoples. A role as a buffer between minority and the majority populations was consistent with the small war's history of the US Army. On the American

frontier for much of the history of the republic, soldiers had been the only arbiters of fairness – albeit between periods of warfare – between the inexorable westward expansion and shrinking indigenous areas of autonomy. American Special Forces might well have served as such a buffer between mobilized Montagnard communities as the Republic of Vietnam fought and developed the institutional structures of self-government and free markets.

Elusive innovation

Innovation was and is by no means a given. The recent, rich literature on military innovation indicates that many factors must be present: an environment of trust and candor; available resources and organizational support for experimentation; and insightful senior leadership capable of synthesizing technological, organizational, and operational factors while protecting and professionally developing young subordinates who believe in and participate in tumults of trials and errors that bring about change. Barriers to innovation were and are very real. Chief among them in South Vietnam between 1961 and 1963 were the difficulties in establishing what critical elements required measuring and just how to go about it. US Army culture presented another consistent innovation challenge.

There was experimentation taking place in Vietnam throughout the American involvement. With regard to the CIA's attempts to improve the worsening security situation in remote parts of South Vietnam, "improvisations were based on special local conditions, the cohesiveness of selected minority groups, and the like. They could not always easily be transformed into national programs."[2] With ready cash and borrowed Special Forces manpower, men like Colonels Layton and Morton as well as the CIA's William Casey drew on OSS experiences with resistance – potential and real – in World War Two and on lessons from support to Greece and the Philippines. Roger Hilsman recalled discussions with Ambassador Nolting about the range of OSS support for guerrillas from the French *maquis* to Hilsman's own experiences in Burma. In Burma "several hundred officers and noncommissioned officers of the American OSS succeeded in building a guerrilla force of thirty thousand men behind the Japanese lines – and they did it with white faces, too."[3]

Small wars in the hamlets and villages involved movement by jungle boot or bare foot and often obsolete small arms. Technology rarely played a primary role. Specialized aircraft facilitated resupply to remote villages and camps, but such missions supported operations where the pace of deliberate patrolling defined the meaning of "maneuver," not the jaunty arrows on a Saigon map or the adapted-from-cavalry images, and helicopter-enabled movements of conventional forces often one step behind the guerrillas. The US Army's institutional biases towards technology and the nascent system of acquisition that grew out of the internecine defense budget battles of

the 1950s helped make airmobility the army's primary innovation initiative, first for the ARVN and later for American combat forces as well.

The American embassy and US Army favored technology rather than soldiers, imposing capabilities on the battlefield rather than assimilating knowledge gained about the battlefield. Such actions leveraged control of efforts to stem the insurgency away from the successful outcomes of Special Forces experiments with the Montagnards. What of the dozens of Special Forces A-teams that rotated through tours across South Vietnam: did they "learn" from their low-tech efforts at the hamlet and village level?

Pre-mission preparation and post-mission debriefing were integral parts of the Special Forces technique. With its roots once again in the OSS procedures of World War Two, teams went into pre-mission isolation before deployment to Vietnam. They consumed area studies, studied French and Vietnamese, and consulted with other Special Forces and teams that had been in country. Transition on the ground often included a week or more of overlap for in-coming detachments to shadow their predecessors, attempting to develop that essential rapport with the indigenous communities so necessary for success. Upon return to Fort Bragg or Okinawa, area studies officers – sergeants and officers – debriefed detachments often for days to get at and record what had worked and what might benefit others. The small size of the Special Forces community ensured that, by the end of 1962, there would often be several members of a detachment rotating to South Vietnam who were veterans of previous tours there or in Laos. Operational detachments were small, self-contained task forces with combat arms, engineering, communications, medical, and intelligence skills resident in the team's collective military training and experience. These cross-functional capabilities also drew on the judgement and maturity of the career noncommissioned officers that made up the core of the A-teams. Teams and individuals both benefitted from the intimacy of long-term qualification processes within the Special Forces group and Special Warfare Center as well as stabilization, at least from alert for overseas deployment, through pre-mission isolation and deployment, to redeployment and debriefing.

Barriers to change and lessons unlearned

Institutional inertia, lack of collective memory, skewed incentive patterns, poor analysis of performance all interlocked to create obstacles to organizational learning. Special Forces had sprung not from the infantry or another combat arm of the US Army but from psychological warfare origins as recently as the Korean War. As a consequence, there were few links to the doctrinal or other institutional structures of the army. Special Forces training and certification began under the auspices of the Special Warfare Center. Group commanders and their sergeants major awarded the coveted beret flash – a shield-shaped piece of colored cloth – to Special Forces

soldiers after they spent a year or so on-the-ground on an operational detachment, well after their training at Fort Bragg. Much of this training and orientation took place at Bad Tolz, Germany, or on Okinawa far from the flagpole at Fort Bragg and an intellectual dimension away from the rest of the US Army. As a consequence there were mechanisms for the transfer of tacit or explicit knowledge of the field-fashioned innovations developed in the CIDG program.

The US Army struggled to carry out the guidance of President Kennedy with regard to counterinsurgency and small wars. A decade of war – a hot war in Korea, a cold war in Europe, and a budget and institutional war in Washington – had left the army intellectually struggling with the challenges of a far-away, small war that was mostly the job of the South Vietnamese. Battlefield mobility and the maturation of the helicopter and other tactical aviation assets combined in the early 1960s to seem to provide the US Army with its prescription for applying conventional means for unconventional ends in Vietnam. South Vietnam's particular context and the general requirements for waging a counterinsurgency went largely misunderstood. The propeller wash of what became an army's worth of helicopters drowned out the knowledge-based requirements to wage small war in Vietnam as the US Army rushed to adopt airmobility. The army culture, embodied by doctrine that sought decision through battle and maneuver, obscured the real challenges in theater.

The army's preoccupation with battle and the enemy's military force led to the adoption of metrics that further masked important data and information about success and failure. As commanders and headquarters in Vietnam and Washington tallied traditional measurements of engagements, bodies, and weapons captured or lost, the South Vietnamese made up whatever numbers seemed to please the American embassy in Saigon about the Strategic Hamlet Program. Together this torrent of numbers hid more than it revealed. The numbers of villages armed and defended, wells sunk or markets opened, or the ever-increasing number of patients who came to either village health clinics or Special Forces sick calls had no power to persuade that the real war might be being won or lost by such means. By the end of 1963, neither in Saigon nor in Washington, did leaders know what they did not know. There was no place in the doctrinal or training processes of the larger army to assimilate the lessons of practice in the Central Highlands.

Knowledge and strategy

There was an appreciation that the conflict in Vietnam was different, from the very beginning:

> much evidence exists of realistic analysis and high-level grasp of the nature of the problem we confronted in Vietnam itself. After all, we

> [American policy makers] had plenty of time to learn – including some twenty years between 1945 and our direct intervention in 1965.

There were constraints to applying American resources to Vietnamese problems, in addition to problems of efficacy and honesty that plagued South Vietnamese regimes, "another set of real-life constraints which made it doubly difficult to adjust to the practical problems of coping with an unfamiliar conflict environment, and greatly influenced what we could and could not, or would and would not, do." Constraints included the historical and intellectual contexts of the army and the near chaos of defense and doctrine debates that raged throughout the 1950s.[4]

Was the war being won or lost by the end of 1963 as the United States struggled to accept the implications of President Kennedy's assassination? Who recognized that insurgency and counterinsurgency required very real change in how the American military in general, and the US Army in particular, thought about and waged war? Both in Saigon and in Washington, there was an inability among senior leaders to sort out appropriate means for the disparate ends. Attempts to measure effectiveness in Saigon and Washington focused on the wrong variables: bodies, weapons, prisoners. These metrics did not reflect performance, only activity. What about results? At least until Operation Switchback, the CIDG program metrics assessed numbers of hamlets and villages defending themselves, a valid measure in a people's war.

The critical disconnect in coming to grips with the strategy of a revolutionary guerrilla war insured that the South Vietnamese and Americans would skew the on-going calculus of ends and means. The absence in this case of knowledge did determine what was possible throughout the interregnum between the two Indochina wars. American leaders, military and political, did not affect the inability of the South Vietnamese, which led to the American war, either to take control of mobilized minorities or competently and honestly to administer the bulk of the country. Saigon and Washington directed and continued to direct military solutions to what were first political problems. Absence of a clear understanding of the terms of engagement led to metrics that misrepresented progress or its lack. The importance the tally of villages actually defended or the swelling census of civilian health patients went unappreciated as the trickle of data and information became a torrent in late 1963. Such soft metrics reflected confidence in rice-roots level administration that grew out of village-based security solutions.

Mistaken knowledge: not knowing what they knew

The insurgents in Vietnam fought a revolutionary war, applying irregular warfare methods to the propagation of an ideology for collectivist revolution.[5] In a revolutionary war, "the enemy never forgets that its fight is first and foremost *political* rather than *military*."[6] Viet Cong insurgents

offered a program of locally elected officials, honest government, and land reform which needed to be fought on its own terms.[7] In December 1963 the DRV leaders restated that victory in the revolutionary struggle in Vietnam's south required combining political struggle with armed struggle. "Both of these forms of struggle were basic and both would play a decisive role, but the armed struggle would be the direct deciding factor in the annihilation of the armed forces of the enemy."[8] This program backed up against the military structure of the guerrillas and ruthless political cadre. Ideology in revolutionary guerrilla war influenced "the making of strategy in two principal ways: it shapes the expectations and goals of those who decide and the ferocity and stamina of those who fight."[9] Douglas Pike observed that the Chinese people's war was about strategy. The Viet Minh war against the French had been about spirit. Insurgents and their DRV sponsors in their war against Diem and the Americans were about organization.[10]

The Diem regime did not stand for anything politically that had resonance in the villages, temples, or cities of the south. Personalism, mandarin intrigue, corruption, and political repression proved no match for the political litany of the Viet Cong addressing long-standing concerns with both a program of reform and the guerrilla's use of force. US Army assistance, training, and organization built an army for the Republic of Vietnam that mirrored American doctrine, which ignored local security and assumed away military civic action.

US Army doctrine was explicit knowledge consistent with its American historical and cultural contexts, reflecting a technology and firepower bias. There was no ready process for incorporating lessons or comparing doctrinal intent with the effects of its execution. Tacit knowledge did not percolate up into the institutional army from either the successful initiatives like the CIDG program or the indicators of failure from the Strategic Hamlet Program or flagging advisory support for examination. This codification shortfall handicapped sufficient understanding by policy makers to innovate or correctly carry out the strategic calculus. Lacking American capabilities as the remnants of the Vietnamese National Army with its French-trained leaders began to incorporate American advisors, the ARVN became the flawed military instrument for fighting the politically focused insurgency.

Saigon's attempts to establish security principally fell to the ARVN to execute. Shaped by the tenets of the US Army's operational doctrine, ARVN maneuver stressed concentration of available forces and overwhelming the enemy on the battlefield with firepower, including artillery and close air support. Fighting in this conventional manner cost more than it gained when the objectives were popular attitudes and not terrain features. Indeed, "collateral damage" done to peasants and their meager property only served to reinforce insurgent propaganda.[11] Assistance for paramilitary forces outside of the CIDG program came too late to save the Strategic Hamlet Program and separate villagers from insurgents. Once night fell,

excepting Montagnard villages and hamlets of the CIDG program, the ARVN withdrew and the insurgents returned.

Three elements comprised the putative counterinsurgency among the Montagnards: defeating the guerrilla forces after mobilizing, arming and training volunteers; separating the insurgency from target populations through the village-based, defensive initial orientation; and establishing government authority and legitimacy with viable political and economic programs percolating up from the hamlet and village level, as appropriate, with a well here, a market there, and health clinics wherever Montagnard village health workers could return from training, or where these minority populations were in need and accessible to a Special Forces medic with an aid bag. The tacit knowledge gained in country by American Special Forces often incorporated these insights derived from practice either through handover protocols as teams rotated in and out or in pre-mission isolation on Okinawa or at Fort Bragg. These Americans also leveraged recent continuities of successful relations and alliances between Montagnard communities and foreigners, in both protecting the indigenous people from Vietnamese depredations and arming them to lead them in combat.

Maximum effective range of an idea: indigenous agency

Diem and his regime embodied the outrages against which the insurgency organized: mandarin privilege, corruption, repression, and foreign involvement. Indeed, Diem struggled to maintain what control the Saigon government had as its legitimacy flickered and faded.[12] Robert Shaplen, a journalist and experienced observer then in Vietnam, concluded that aid to Saigon "should have been extended only under the condition that the Vietnamese seriously undertake political reforms."[13] Shaplen only echoed the position of Ambassador Durbrow and his successors. The United States backed Diem in the tumult of political unrest and successionist strife between November 1954 and 1956; elections ultimately were not held.[14] With these actions the Americans accepted at least partial responsibility for the Saigon regime's limitations and Diem and his brother's increasingly despotic actions. Despite increasing amounts of American assistance, heavily skewed by the Military Assistance Program and the direct access the MAAG chiefs had to President Diem, neither the ambassadors nor the senior military advisors found the necessary levers to move South Vietnamese political behaviors.

Accelerating authoritarian trends in the Saigon regime, beginning in 1958, made it more and more difficult to help the regime establish legitimacy or develop efficacy in the wake of the chauvinism of the previous French colonial administration. Against the backdrop of a growing insurgency, even getting the skewed data and information relating to assistance and development became an exercise in futility. Diem's regime claimed an increasing number of hamlets secure or ARVN commanders

reported areas swept clear of guerrillas in reports that reflected less ground truth. The simple legitimacy conferred by mobilization of whole Montagnard hamlets and villages and their commitment to self-defense went unappreciated.

Successful mobilization of many Montagnard communities itself brought about problems. Heedless, at first, of the traditional enmities existing between the minorities and the Vietnamese, Special Forces efforts provided the means for the Montagnards to assert their independence and coalesce around ethnonationalist leaders. Sensing this, South Vietnamese administrators were unhappy at the existence of armed, trained Montagnards, virtually supported and led by American Special Forces. The uncertain quality of LLDB soldiers who had to replace the virtual leadership of the departing Americans exacerbated tensions as camps and communities went over to Vietnamese control. Actions aimed at limiting nascent Montagnard autonomy as camps and area development centers often brought local conflicts into sharp focus as Montagnard village defenders or strike forces converted to district or provincial control. These tensions would overflow in September 1964 into a full-blown mutiny against South Vietnamese authority from five camps surrounding Ban Me Thout. Only days of tense negotiations with Montagnard leaders – facilitated by American advisors and Special Forces officers who had maintained rapport – prevented a bloodbath.

The Montagnard efforts to assert autonomy represented a microcosm of the Republic of Vietnam as an experiment in democracy. Other ethnic minorities like the Khmer and cultural-religious minorities like the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai participated in the CIDG program from this period of initial Special Forces success until the war's bitter end. There was only superficial assimilation or largely ineffective efforts to integrate South Vietnam's diverse populations and interests as a succession of juntas and regimes fought for life against an increasingly hostile insurgency.

Complexity and the limits of perception

South Vietnam presented a kaleidoscope of changing alliances and issues. Despite years of assistance to the French in their war against the Viet Minh, varied settings from the Central Highlands to the marshy Delta, as well as an intricate social and historical matrix of ethnic, religious, and political strife confronted the Americans who struggled to help the new republic defend itself and develop into a democracy. Poorly prepared for self-rule by the chauvinistic French colonial administration, South Vietnam's appointed leaders soon faced an insurgency opposed to the republic's survival. Countering the insurgency was very much dependent on the forbearance of American advisors and assistance. American civilian and military advisors – largely ignorant of Vietnam's history, language, culture, and diversity – faced the tasks of matching means to ends for a combined

opposition to the fledgling insurgency. Matching ends and means – the on-going calculus of strategy – applies no less to waging small wars, though different equations possessed of different variables may be necessary for each village or province.

> Ultimately, makers of strategy must narrow their focus; too much complexity makes the mind seize. At a minimum they must see clearly both themselves and potential adversaries, their strengths, weaknesses, preconceptions, and limits – through humility, relentless and historically informed critical analysis, and restless dissatisfaction even in victory. They must weigh imponderables through structured debates that pare away personal, organizational, and national illusions and conceits. They must squarely address issues that are bureaucratic orphans. They must unerringly discern and prepare to strike the enemy's jugular – whether by surprise attack or by attrition, in war or in political and economic struggle. And in the end, makers of strategy must cheerfully face the uncertainties of decision and the dangers of action.[15]

The combined efforts of South Vietnamese and American leaders fell largely flat by the end of 1963. Viewed as a fitness landscape requiring innovation, South Vietnam presented challenges that demanded quick recognition of the terms of conflict followed by rapid experimentation to support adaptation to resist the well-organized, hamlet- and village-based insurgency. None of the balance or decisiveness demanded of a leader or strategist showed through repeated attempts to force American solutions on Vietnamese problems. These attempts included the Saigon regime's attempts to move into the hamlets and villages with a maladroit civil service or the heavy-handed ARVN. The former could not challenge insurgent organizational efforts and the latter rarely found or fought guerrilla to a favorable end.[16]

Insurgent cadres had learned and adapted in similar, harsh fitness landscapes of the struggles against Japanese invaders and French colonialists. Methods and principles of organization as well as tactics and operations worked or their adherents died trying them. These forced evolutionary cycles bred the behaviors and structure of the indigenous revolutionary guerrilla warfare. South Vietnam's fledgling functionaries had only the shallow talent pool of low-level colonial administration as a brief evolutionary experience. The ARVN relied on the paternalistic, largely French officer-led experience of the road-bound, conventional-minded Vietnamese National Army for its pedigree. Lessons of the French-led mobile groups went unheeded, outside the CIDG program. The evolutionary rigors of these two sets of experiences and precedents proved no match for the ardor and depth of the hardened insurgents. American advisors were largely unable to provide a competitive advantage through their political or military efforts.

Small war: limits to learning

Perhaps the most famous Clausewitzian dictum is "that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means." Leaders – political and military, Vietnamese and American – would have done well to remember Clausewitz's qualifiers to his pronouncement:

> What remains peculiar to war is simply the peculiar nature of its means. War in general, and the commander in any specific instance, is entitled to require that the trend and designs of policy shall not be inconsistent with these means.[17]

One chronicler of the Kennedy administration wrote of the participants that it was "as if these men did not need to know about such a distant and somewhat less worthy part of the world."[18] "Can do-ism" pervaded many Americans involved, from advisors in the Delta to the White House. There was little tolerance for those not on board.

American counterinsurgency during this critical period failed. This failure resulted from the synergy of several factors, a sterling example of Clausewitzian friction. Other international issues competed for the new president's attention: the neutralization of Laos (the Kennedy administration's first foreign policy challenge); the Bay of Pigs disaster in Cuba; and the Berlin crisis and the erection of the wall.[19] Institutional, cultural predilections biased towards battle within the American armed forces in general and the army specifically, as well as doctrinal confusion coming out of the bureaucratic tumult of the 1950s, created a significant barrier to change. Vietnam's problems were just one discordant note in a crescendo of low-intensity, international conflict. Cumulatively, friction began to confuse perception and degrade such attention as turned towards South Vietnam among the competing crises. Official correspondence between Saigon and Washington throughout this period – among the highest-level leaders, civilian and military – is replete with references to potential continuities with the French or British, the limitations of military solutions, and the specialness of circumstances in Vietnam, yet senior leaders chose the course of action that largely pushed aside Vietnamese solutions to Vietnamese problems.

The failure of the Strategic Hamlet Program tied together the misinterpretation of actual counterinsurgency requirements and the maladroit advisory efforts. South Vietnamese local district and provincial officials told their superiors what they wanted to hear about their hamlets.[20] The friction of ineptitude, fear, and the sheer scope of the undertaking complicated actions required to begin and maintain a functioning Vietnamese-conducted counterinsurgency program. The Strategic Hamlet Program served as a highly visible target for the Viet Cong. Insurgents attacked the few Strategic

Hamlet Program successes with guerrilla action and extolled program failures with propaganda.

The Saigon regime and its American advisors gave military measures primary concern in this war of ideas. Fall wrote succinctly that, in counterinsurgency, "the insurgency problem is militarily [*sic*] only in a secondary sense, and politically, ideologically, and administratively in a primary sense."[21] What most American advisors looked for was the old-fashioned "set-piece battle" to counter this revolutionary war, precisely what their French predecessors had sought.[22] These practices emphasized "finding, fixing, and fighting" the enemy and a reliance on the tools of firepower, artillery, and air support.

Helicopter mobility seemed to promise a bridge between maneuver and Krepinevich's "Concept." Terrain and distance would no longer complicate finding or closing with the enemy as airmobile units would swoop down to give chase or force battle. These offensive and military practices and tools left not only the Montagnards but many other minorities and rural Vietnamese vulnerable to the organizational and political efforts of the insurgents. Airmobility's military potential, while supporting counterguerrilla operations and strategy, masked the insufficiency of airmobility to address the political and social factors at the heart of the counterinsurgency requirements. Trying to graft the discontinuity of American-influenced conventional operations on to the struggle to create a counterinsurgency solution on the fly (albeit with the technology-based enhancement of airmobility) furthered the confusion inherent in matching ends to means. American advisors taught what they had been taught. Theory and doctrine demonstrated their limits in institutional failure.

Small wars: a coda

American Special Forces soldiers, willing and able to live among the Montagnards, shared the danger of war at this intimate, deadly level. It took hard men – made lean from arduous training and countless miles walked along highland trails – who could and would take the fight, alongside their Montagnard allies, to the insurgents. Mobilization based on trust and focused on self-defense as well as material development was very effective. It required, though, rare individuals able and willing to squat for hours by smoky fires in the mist-shrouded highlands, living in longhouses, and swilling rice wine in enormous draughts, but above all respecting the ways of the targeted communities and peoples. It required allowing these communities political space as well.

The Montagnards found a lever with which to move the cause of their ethnonationalism from dream towards reality. Subsequent events also proved the cause of Montagnard recognition to be too fragile to survive South Vietnam's ultimate fate. Operational and strategic decisions made in Saigon and Washington ignored this intimacy among American Special Forces and

Montagnard minorities as well as its implications and limitations. By 1963 the small war became offensive and military. This shift codified the critical American decision to engage the insurgency as a military campaign, leaving its political dimensions to the South Vietnamese. The inability of South Vietnamese regimes successfully to take control of an effective, on-going, counterinsurgency program with all of its political, social, and other dimensions demonstrated a handicap so crippling that no amount of external therapy could repair. Though best left to counterfactual examination, if it could not be a Vietnamese war, did it have to become an American one?

The tools and practices of the small war were not new in the early 1960s. They were certainly present during the same period when the Army of the Republic of Vietnam became organized and trained to mirror an American one. An appreciation by senior South Vietnamese or American leaders of the mutual respect and efficacy present in the mobilization of the Montagnard communities by Special Forces might have revealed to these leaders the limitations of their sanctioned, offensive/military approach. Knowledge of the actual conduct and limitations of war at the hamlet and village level was a source of competitive advantage that eluded leaders in Saigon and Washington.

Small wars mostly use small arms, requiring the stamina and field craft to close with the enemy, as well as individual proficiency with arms limited in their destructiveness. This small war, in the case of the counterinsurgency in the Central Highlands, focused on the objective of enabling Montagnard communities to protect themselves. A counter-guerrilla war largely replaced this counterinsurgency by 1963. This war, with its "advice" to the South Vietnamese, principally aimed at the military dimension of dealing with elusive guerrillas. The insurgents themselves focused still on the indigenous communities. More and more of South Vietnam's residents, minority and Vietnamese alike, went unprotected from insurgent cadres while ARVN patrols searched farther afield. Special Forces solders deployed to even more remote regions in the vague regions of the Laotian and Cambodian borders in a thin line of frontier camps to try to interdict infiltration. Montagnard communities – literally displacing as whole villages – became virtual mercenaries, serving as contract soldiers under American leadership and the thinnest veneer of allegiance to South Vietnam.

The cognitive dominance demonstrated by US Army Special Forces did constitute an operational innovation. Institutional failure followed these developments. Leaders in Saigon and Washington proved unable to grasp the war's true nature, its requirements for an indigenous solution built on ideas, vouched safe by force of arms. Culture and doctrine both added to the grinding friction of war, creating barriers to accurate perception and action. More than a decade of an increasingly deadly war followed these lessons not learned, the opportunities not taken.

Appendix

Constituent elements of knowledge

There is a fascination throughout the military with the practices and processes of business. Undeniable similarities exist between the hierarchical organizations of the marketplace and the battlefield. The very nature of American military professionalism grew out of the same society and culture that codified requirements for business, medicine, and the law.[1] "The enemy moves at the speed of business," concluded a recent classified study of intelligence processes that support the war on terror in Afghanistan. Rhetorically this study asked "What speed do we move at? The speed of process."[2] Analysis of the elements of how things get done offers opportunities for more than a metaphor.

The search for competitive advantage is at the heart of the rapid learning and adaptation that must take place when business organizations in the marketplace or military organizations on the battlefield face their opposition. Doctrine, training, and technology developed and acquired between wars may well not meet the requirements of the next conflict just as last season's flu vaccine may do nothing to prevent this year's illness.

Knowledge is information filtered through human experience and judgement. Knowledge management deals with data and information, the components of knowledge, but also "is as much about culture as it is about tools. It depends on everyone sharing what they know – not hoarding it – and on building interpersonal trust, a common vocabulary, and common goals and values." PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLC found, in a survey conducted in 2000, that World Wide Web pages dealing with knowledge management exceeded 37,900, and that there were more than 266 books on the subject. This consulting firm explained to its clients that knowledge "is more than information."[3]

The distinctions between data, information, and knowledge are important and central to any discussion of knowledge creation and organization. "Data," according to analysts Thomas Davenport and Laurence Prusak, "is a set of discrete, objective facts about events." This includes amount of ammunition expended or ordered, number of recruits trained, and the like. Individuals form information, "to shape the person who gets it, to make some difference in his outlook or insight." Information includes

reports, memoranda, and such, gathered, processed, and provided. People at some work draw knowledge from "a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a frame work for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information." Unlike data and information, knowledge is dynamic and exists as much in minds and practices as in structured formats, "part and parcel of human complexity and unpredictability."[4] Elements of knowledge are also diverse in form. Different forms affect outcomes in different ways.

Codification: tacit versus explicit

People purposely form data and information into knowledge. This knowledge is the basis for some sort of action: a decision, a product, or an attack. There are two kinds of knowledge, tacit and explicit. Tacit knowledge is "personal knowledge embedded in individual experience and involves intangible factors such as personal belief, perspective, and the value system."[5] This type of knowledge – as much a part of the people who develop and possess it as of an organization or structure – is fragile and intuitive. Tacit knowledge is also critical to accomplishing organizational objectives and adapting. Codification allows the capture of elements of such knowledge, making them explicit. Codification requires sensitivity to cultural inflection and nuance to be effective. Knowledge management analysts and theorists often resort to symphony metaphors, referring to the difficulties in capturing directorial or orchestral style as a component of a performance.[6]

Explicit knowledge "can be articulated in formal language including grammatical statements, mathematical expressions, specifications, manuals, and so forth."[7] Reports, patents, and manuals – like doctrine – are examples of explicit knowledge.

Tacit knowledge is volatile and difficult to capture and share. Explicit knowledge, while easier to communicate, lacks the full meaning necessary to ensure successful accomplishment of the required action. Tacit and explicit knowledge taken together can interact through a spiral conversion process to create knowledge required to achieve the desired objective.[8] An organization's culture – webs of meaning, shared behaviors and understanding, and common tools and practices for their use or material culture – affects the dynamic process of knowledge creation. Knowledge creation is an adaptive response to challenges for organizations in the wider world.

Process versus practice

There is an implicit linearity in processes that progress, adding resources and influencing outcomes. This linearity, however, obscures the roles of context, contingency, and friction in affecting outcomes.[9] All of these elements affect the balance of the marketplace, whether competitors or opposing forces, as organizations and their members struggle to match their tacit knowledge

and past experiences with the guidelines of explicit knowledge or doctrine to accomplish their missions. This struggle to apply what is known – tacit and explicit but which may not agree – to what must be done takes place while competitors clash. Process may capture doctrine in organizations and structure.

Practice is the actual implementation of doctrine to satisfy requirements. Practice is execution. Tension may arise if process capabilities do not match practice requirements. Experimentation must take place. Adaptation takes place as creativity occurs in experimentation to bridge gaps between tactical and operational requirements and doctrine, organization, and/or structure, or to stretch constrained resources.[10] Successful adaptations reconcile the tension between process and practice. Innovation represents the comprehensive solution set comprised of successful adaptations across a range of similar responses to discontinuities, or gateway or breakthrough events, that become part of how the organization behaves in the future.

The management structures of some organizations are top-down or hierarchical. Knowledge creation in top-down management structures is a vertical matter of information transfer "passed up the pyramid to top executives, who then use it to create plans and orders, which pass eventually down the hierarchy." Other organizations have bottom-up management structures. Knowledge creation in bottom-up structures is horizontal and workers on the front line of business activities see, assess, and decide: "individuals, not a group of individuals interacting with each another, create knowledge."[11] A middle path lies between these management structural poles if knowledge creation is a principal consideration.

Knowledge has no necessary ties to a given technological level or set of tools, weapons, or support systems. If or when knowledge ceases to remain current or its practitioners lapse in their training or commitment, doctrine can turn into dogma and/or training into drudgery. Data and information may be biased or misinterpreted. Tacit knowledge may not readily process into explicit forms or be readily gathered or transmitted because of operational or cultural friction. This entropy puts individuals and organizations at risk.

Metrics

Leaders must measure the impact of knowledge to assess progress towards success at all operational echelons, in the marketplace or in military affairs. Like other forms of capital, return on investment assessments are critical for knowledge – intellectual capital – as the organization tracks progress or its lack towards strategic objectives. Organizations need both value metrics – those that measure goal achievement – and process metrics – those that measure the incremental factors that contribute to the accomplishment of goals – and to pare down measures to critical ones.[12] Analyst Barry Watts acknowledged the role of measurement in the conduct of warfare. "Tactical

interactions and effects, unlike those at the operational and strategic levels of war, *are* amenable to quantification and statistical analysis, at least up to a point," Watts wrote. Further, Watts observed that "the reason for separating the aspects of war that are quantifiable from those that are not along the imprecise boundary dividing tactical interactions from the operational level of war lies in the degree of penetration by political-strategic objectives."[13] Some appropriate sense of costs and gains is necessary for organizations to set goals, assess progress, and ultimately gauge success or failure. As an interim accommodation, organizations must learn in order to adapt and survive.

Learning organizations

Another element of a knowledge-based view of organizations incorporates learning as a critical process. The learning organization "is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights."[14] Gathering and adapting to lessons learned from the execution of operations are central to the identity of the learning organization, especially the military learning organization.

The contemporary proponent of the learning organization is Peter Senge. His book *The Fifth Discipline: the Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* grew out of his study of businesses as they coped with the managerial buffeting of quality management and reengineering in the late 1980s. Senge defines a learning organization as "an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future. For such an organization, it is not enough merely to survive."[15] *The Fifth Discipline* and Senge's consulting work helped develop and implement strategies to inculcate such generative capabilities in client organizations.[16] A similar sense of the implicit need for learning and adaptation comes out of an examination of a number of military innovation studies.

Notes

Introduction

1. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 9.
2. Clausewitz, *On War*, 140–141.
3. The knowledge–strategy link is an important topic in contemporary business literature. See Michael Zack, ''Developing a Knowledge Strategy,'' *California Management Review* (vol. 41, no. 3, Spring 1999) and Michael Zack, ed., *Knowledge and Strategy* (Boston: Butterworth Heinemann, 1999).
4. Sir Michael Howard, *Lessons of History* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1991), 13.
5. Sir Michael Howard, ''The Use and Abuse of Military History,'' *The Causes of Wars, and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 195.
6. MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray, ''Thinking about Revolutions in Warfare,'' MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray, eds, *The Dynamics of Military Revolution 1300–2050* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7.
7. *United States–Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense Study, Government Printing Office, 1971), 9–21. Henceforth referred to as *DoD Study*.
8. Dennis J. Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), Chapter 5. Duncanson was an experienced British Asia hand. He served in Vietnam during the interregnum between the two Indochina Wars. Duncanson knew many leaders and functionaries. Also see Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: the Early Years 1941–1960* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, Government Printing Office, 1985), Chapter 12.
9. The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: the Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*, trans. Merle L. Pribbenow, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2002), Chapter 3; Gerald C. Hickey, *Village in Vietnam* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1964), 277.
10. *DoD Study*, vol. 2, 19; Edward G. Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: an American's Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), Chapters 14 and 15.
11. *DoD Study*, vol. 2, 1–13; Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution: the United States in Vietnam, 1946–1966* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1966), 113–138.
12. *DoD Study*, vol. 2, 13.

13. *DoD Study*, vol. 2, 15.
14. Shaplen, *Lost Revolution*, 130–131.
15. Dispatch from Ambassador Durbrow to Department of State, March 2 1959, Subject "The Can Lao," *The Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1958–1960, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1986), 145. Henceforth referred to as *FRUS*.
16. *FRUS*, vol. 1, 155.
17. *FRUS*, vol. 1, 145.
18. Dispatch from Ambassador Durbrow to the Department of State, March 7 1960, *FRUS*, vol. 1, 302.
19. Dispatch from Ambassador Durbrow to the Department of State, March 7 1960, *FRUS*, vol. 1, 29–30.
20. Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965–1973* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1988), 8.
21. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: a History* (New York: The Viking Press, 1983), 231; Bernard B. Fall, *Last Reflections on a War* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), 199.
22. Durbrow dispatch, March 7 1960, *FRUS*, vol. 1, 302.
23. Gerald C. Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands to 1954* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1982), 4–19' and *Free in the Forest: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands, 1954–1976* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1982), 300–303.
24. *DoD Study*, vol. 2, 49–50.
25. Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars*, 372.
26. Fall, *Last Reflections*, 198.
27. Karnow, *Vietnam: a History*, 238.
28. Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 21 and 48.
29. Memorandum from Robert W. Komer to W. W. Rostow, "Comments on Program of Action for Vietnam," April 28 1961, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, "Vietnam", vol. 1, at http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_i_1961/d.html. Henceforth, *FRUS* on-line.
30. For instance, see memorandum from W. W. Rostow to General Maxwell D. Taylor, "A Plan for CINCPAC [Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet] to Prepare in the Next Two Weeks," October 16, 1961 and Letter from Lieutenant General Lionel McGarr [Chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam] to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, untitled, October 30 1961, *FRUS* on-line.
31. Letter from General Maxwell D. Taylor to President Kennedy, Taylor Mission report, untitled, November 3 1961, *FRUS* on-line.
32. Memorandum from Director of Intelligence and Research to the Secretary of State, "General Taylor's Recommendations on South Vietnam," November 16 1961, *FRUS* on-line.

1 Crossbows to carbines

1. National Security Action Memorandum No. 124, January 18 1962, "Establishment of the Special Group (Counter-Insurgency)," *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 2, 660; "Development of Counter-Guerrilla Forces," February 3 1961, National Security Files (NSF), Box 328, John Fitzgerald Kennedy Presidential Library, National Archives and Records Administration. Henceforth, JFKL.
2. Folder "Cuba: Bay of Pigs," Box W-57, Personal Papers of Arthur M. Schlesinger, JFKL, NARA; Arthur M. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 585, and *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (New York:

Ballentine Books, 1978), 480–503. Also see William J. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), 51.

3. Maxwell D. Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 6.
4. Paul F. Campbell to Major Louis T. Dorogi, "Medical Information 1961," US Army Special Operations Command Archives, Fort Bragg, North Carolina (Dorogi files, Vietnam Collection). Henceforth referred to as Campbell interview.
5. Campbell interview, 5.
6. Campbell interview; US Army Special Warfare School, *Montagnard Tribal Groups of the Republic of South Viet-Nam* (Fort Bragg, NC: GPO, 1964), 170; Gerald Hickey, *Free in the Forest: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands 1954–1976* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1982), 75; Charles M. Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets: the First Thirty Years, a History of the US Army Special Forces* (New York: Berkeley Books, 1984), 107. The International Volunteer Services was a precursor of the Peace Corps.
7. Campbell interview, 34–35.
8. "Outline History of the 5th SF Gp (ABN) Participation in the CIDG Program 1961–1970, 6–7, Record Group 319, Records of the Army Staff, NARA, College Park, MD; Frederick H. Stires, *The US Special Forces CIDG Mission in Viet-Nam: a Preliminary Case Study in Counterpart and Civil-Military Relationships*, Special Operations Research Office (SORO), The American University (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, November 1964), 27–28, Record Group 319; Francis J. Kelly, Colonel, *Vietnam Studies: US Army Special Forces, 1961–1971* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army GPO, 1985), 24.
9. Seth Gitell, "Broken Promise," USASOC Archives, Vietnam Collection (unpublished honors thesis, Harvard University, 1991), 47; William Colby, with James McCargar, *Lost Victory: a Firsthand Account of America's Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989), 90–91; Shelby Stanton, *Green Berets at War: US Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia 1956–1975* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1985), 39–40; Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, 75; Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 24; Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 69 and 106. Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 51; from author's experience in the 10th, 7th, and 12th Special Forces Groups (ABN) – or "Jacqueline Kennedy's Own Rifles" to Special Forces detractors.
10. Stires, *The US Special Forces CIDG Mission in Viet-Nam*, 7, 9; Campbell interview and Gitell, "Broken Promise," 47; Colby, *Lost Victories*, 90–91; Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 107; Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, 75.
11. "Annex B to 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces Outline History," Cabinet 1, Drawer 3, USASOC Archives, 1, henceforth "Annex B to 5th Special Forces Group History."
12. "1961–1970 5th Special Forces Group (Abn) Outline History, Vietnam," USASOC Archives, Vietnam Collection, 2, henceforth "Outline History"; Gitell, "Broken Promise," 27, 40; Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 6; Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 105; Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 39.
13. "1962–64 1st Special Forces Group (Abn), Vietnam," USASOC Archives, Vietnam Collection, Fort Bragg, NC, not numbered; "1961–70 5th Special Forces Group (Abn) in Vietnam," 2–3; "Outline History," 2, 7; Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 24–30; Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 107–110; Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 41–42.
14. "1961–70 5th Special Forces Group (Abn) in Vietnam," 2; "1961–70 Outline History," 6–7; Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 26–28.
15. "Outline History," 9; "5th Special Forces Group (Abn) in Vietnam," 3, 5.

16. "Annex B, 5th Special Forces Group History," 2.
17. "Annex B, 5th Special Forces Group History," 2.
18. "5th Special Forces Group in Vietnam," 5; Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 35; Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 111; Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 43–46.
19. MSG L. R. Fisher, quoted from a taped interview dated December 18 1970, "Outline History of the 5th SF Gp (Abn) Participation in the CIDG Program 1961–1970," USASOC Archives, Cabinet 1, Drawer 2, 3.
20. "7th Special Forces Group (Abn) in Vietnam," debriefing with Captain Johnson, detachment commander, on projects; "5th Special Forces Group (Abn) in Vietnam," 3.
21. Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 110.
22. "Annex B, 5th Special Forces Group," 2.
23. "Annex B, 5th Special Forces Group," 2.
24. "Annex B, 5th Special Forces Group," 2.
25. "Annex B, 5th Special Forces Group," 3.
26. "Outline History of the 5th SF Gp (Abn) Participation in the CIDG Program 1961–1970," USASOC Archives, Cabinet 1, Drawer 2, 11.
27. "Annex B to 5th Special Forces Group," 4.
28. Then-Colonel Yarborough presented President Kennedy a green beret as the president moved to inspect Yarborough's soldiers during a visit to Fort Bragg in 1961. The beret was unofficial headgear, much reviled by regular forces and commanders. Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 34. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises*, 130–131; Douglas S. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: US Doctrine and Performance, 1950 to the Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 106–107 and 258; Shelby Stanton, *The Rise and Fall of an American Army: US Ground Forces in Vietnam, 1965–1973* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1985), 19; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, Chapter 3, "Into the Quagmire," details the hand-off of Special Forces missions despite operational success and virtually no US appreciation of the political nature of the conflict.
29. Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 107; on US Army Special Forces selection and training criteria see "Special Forces Qualification History," USASOC Archives, Vietnam Collection, Fort Bragg, NC, 2, and my Chapter 4. Shackleton's operational detachment had a relative wealth of language-qualified members, but the team was not representative. Language qualification in Vietnamese to say nothing of Montagnard dialects plagued advisory efforts in this early period of American support. This caveat came out of a conversation between the author and Colonel (Ret.) Paddock at the April 2000 Society of Military History conference during our discussion of my paper "Like the Peace Corps with Guns" on US Army Special Forces and the Second Indochina War.
30. "Outline History of the 5th SFG(A) Participation in the CIDG Program, 1961–1970," 8; Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 28; Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 110.
31. Colby, *Lost Victory*, 164; Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 27; Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 169–73.
32. "Annex B, 5th Special Forces Group," 6 and 8; conversation with then-Colonel Richard W. Potter at Fort Bragg, NC, July 1998 concerning the unconventional nature of the integrity and leadership challenges that face Special Forces leaders.
33. Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 111.
34. "Outline History of the 5th SF Gp (Abn) Participation in the CIDG Program 1961–1970", USASOC Archives, Cabinet 1, Drawer 2, 2.
35. "Outline History," 2; "5th Special Forces Group (Abn) in Vietnam," 5–6.
36. "Outline History," 9–10, Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 32–34, Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 43–44 (also see "Bi-Monthly Operations Summaries") provide an over-the-shoulder look at these operations. For example, a look

at the Hoa Cam Training Center numbers for the December 1962–January 1963 period reveals that some 1,563 personnel were in training, with another 1,322 recently completed – the equivalent of about four battalions of riflemen.

37. "Outline History," 9; Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 32. Proponency for paramilitary programs was – and has continued to be – contentious. During World War Two, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) ran paramilitary programs to mobilize resistance groups, often made up of ethnic minorities, in Burma, Indochina, and other places. Both the CIA and the US Army Special Forces have OSS bloodlines. The Korean War saw the recruiting and training of Korean paramilitary forces for a variety of missions by the army and intelligence community. Doctrinally, Special Forces had the unconventional warfare mission to raise and train behind-the-lines resistance forces in Eastern Europe in the event of something like a conventional third world war against the Soviets and the Warsaw Pact.
38. Colby, *Lost Victory*, 164. Marshall Lyautey was the French Resident-General of Morocco from 1912 to 1925. Also see Douglas Porch, "Bugeaud, Gallieni, Lyautey: the Development of French Colonial Warfare," Peter Paret, ed., with Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), 376–407, as well as Jean Gottmann, "Bugeaud, Gallieni, Lyautey: the Development of French Colonial Warfare," Edward Mead Earle, ed., with Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, *Makers of Modern Strategy Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1943), 234–259.
39. "CIDG and Other SVN Paramilitary Programs – Current Deployment and Future Plans," MACV J3, USASOC Archives, Box 15, "SF Site and Troop Disposition Info," 1.
40. Colby, *Lost Victory*, 163–164; Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 30 and 35; Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 51; Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, 80.
41. "Outline History," 11; "5th Special Forces Group (Abn) in Vietnam," 7; Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 42.
42. Colby, *Lost Victory*, 163; Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 111.
43. "Operational Summary," Headquarters, US Army Special Forces (Provisional) Vietnam, undated [chronologically placed from dates in the document as October 1962], USASOC Archives, Vietnam Collection, 1961–1966, 1.
44. "Operational Summary," 2.
45. "Operational Summary," 3.
46. "Operational Summary," 3–4.
47. "Annex B, 5th Special Forces Group," 5.
48. "Outline History of the 5th SF Gp (Abn) Participation in the CIDG Program 1961–1970," USASOC Archives, Cabinet 1, Drawer 2, 9, quoted from a Research Analysis Corporation report (T-477, p. 37).
49. "Annex B, 5th Special Forces Group," 7.
50. "Outline History of the 5th SF Gp (Abn) Participation in the CIDG Program 1961–1970," USASOC Archives, Cabinet 1, Drawer 2, 3; "Annex B to 5th Special Forces Group," 7.
51. "Annex B, 5th Special Forces Group," 7–8.
52. "Annex B, 5th Special Forces Group," 8.
53. "Annex B, 5th Special Forces Group," 9.
54. Frederick H. Stires, *The US Special Forces CIDG Mission in Viet-Nam*, Record Group 319, NARA, College Park, MD, and Kelly, *US Army Special Forces,* 37. Stires' figures are a February 1963 estimate from a non-attributed source and slightly higher than Kelly's figures.

55. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era*, 106.
56. Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (Krulak) to the Secretary of Defense (McNamara), "Support for Paramilitary and Irregular Elements in Vietnam," July 30 1962, *FRUS*, vol. 2, 564–565.
57. Krepinevich, *The Army in Vietnam*, 71.
58. Report by the Senate Majority Leader (Mansfield), Washington, December 18 1962, "Southeast Asia – Vietnam," *FRUS*, vol. 2, 780.
59. Robert W. Komer, *Bureaucracy at War US Performance in the Vietnam Conflict* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1986), xi.
60. Komer, *Bureaucracy at War*, 3.
61. Komer, *Bureaucracy at War*, 113.
62. Komer, *Bureaucracy at War*, 114.
63. "Outline History of the 5th SF Gp (Abn) Participation in the CIDG Program 1961–1970," USASOC Archives, Cabinet 1, Drawer 2, 5.

2 Combatants and continuities

1. George Condominas, *We Have Eaten the Forest: the Story of a Montagnard Village in the Central Highlands of Vietnam*, trans. by Adriene Foulke (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977). Frank M. Lebar, Gerald C. Hickey, and John K. Musgrave, eds., *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, Connecticut: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1964). US Army Special Warfare School, *Montagnard Tribal Groups of the Republic of South Viet-Nam* (Fort Bragg, NC: Government Printing Office, 1964). Gerald C. Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands to 1954* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1982), *Shattered World: Adaptation and Survival among Vietnam's Highland Peoples during the Vietnam War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), and *Free in the Forest*. Karl L. Hutterer, A. Terry Rambo, and George Lovelace, eds., *Cultural Values and Human Ecology in Southeast Asia* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan), 1985.
2. Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, 21–28; Special Warfare School, *Montagnard Tribal Groups*, 162–176.
3. Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, preface and 5.
4. Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 19; Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, 60.
5. Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, Chapter 1.
6. William J. Duiker, *Vietnam: Revolution in Transition* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995), 9 and 129.
7. Joseph J. Zasloff, *Rural Resettlement in Vietnam: An Agroville in Development* (Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group, Agency for International Development, 1960). Diemist policies are the subject of this monograph. Hickey, *Free in the Forest,* Chapters 1–2, *passim*.
8. Zasloff, *Rural Resettlement*, 20, 25, 27; Hickey, *Free in the Forest; Montagnard Tribal Groups*, 171–172.
9. "Debriefing of Colonel George C. Morton, Commanding Officer, US Army Special Forces Vietnam, September 1 1962 through November 6 1963," Record Group 319, Records of the Army Staff, NARA, College Park, MD, Box 12, 5.
10. *DoD Study*, vol. 2: 15; Karnow, *Vietnam: a History*, 231; Fall, *Last Reflections*, 199; Shaplen, *Lost Revolution*, 130–131.
11. "Debriefing of Colonel George C. Morton," 6.
12. William P. Yarborough, Major General, "1964 Yarborough, MG Presentation to National Interdepartmental Seminar," and "These Were the Green Berets:

By Their Deeds We Knew Them'' (USASOC Archives, Vietnam Collection, Fort Bragg, NC, November 18 1964 and undated), 9. Then-Colonel Yarborough commanded the Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in the early 1960s. He exercised a tremendous influence on Special Forces through his control of proponency and training as well as his unceasing advocacy of unconventional warfare. In these pieces he discusses the unique qualifications of Special Forces soldiers and the nation's requirements for their skills and service.

13. William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 210.
14. US Army Regulation 614–62, *Assignments, Details, and Transfers: Selection and Assignment of Personnel to Special Forces Organizations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1961), 1–2; US Army Field Manual 31-21, *Guerrilla Warfare and Special Forces Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1961), Chapter 2.
15. ''Special Forces Qualification History'' (USASOC Archives, Fort Bragg, NC, undated) details the qualification requirements from the period. See also ''7th Special Forces Group (Abn) History, 1960–62'' (USASOC Archives, Fort Bragg, NC undated), III-2 on military occupational skill training and the accomplishment of difficult, unit-level training. Kurt Lang, ''American Military Performance in Vietnam: Background and Analysis,'' in Peter Karsten, ed., *The Military in America: from the Colonial Era to the Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 401 and 407, discusses the Special Forces soldier as much less likely to experience psychological or other problems presumably because of factors such as peer group identification and shared risks. Joseph A. Olmstead, *et al.*, *Selection and Training for Small Independent Action Forces: Development of Materials and Procedures* (Alexandria, Virginia: Human Resources Research Organization (for Advanced Research Projects Agency, DoD), 1971) and *Selection and Training for Small Independent Action Forces: Final Report* (1972) detail the methodology and findings of attempts to make more predictable the process of selecting and training special operators. Eliot A. Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians: Elite Military Units in Modern Democracies* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1978), passim, on problems for the Army and Special Forces associated with elite units. As well see Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, 166; Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 22–26; Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 3–4.
16. William P. Yarborough, Major General, ''1964 Yarborough, MG Presentation to National Interdepartmental Seminar,'' and ''These Were the Green Berets: By Their Deeds We Knew Them,'' 9.
17. Thomas A. Jones III, US Army, Command Sergeant Major (Ret.), interview by author, Fort Bragg, NC, 7 November 1994.
18. William P. Yarborough, Major General, ''1964 Yarborough, MG Presentation to National Interdepartmental Seminar,'' and ''These Were the Green Berets: By Their Deeds We Knew Them,'' 12.
19. *Readings in Counter-Guerrilla Operations* (revised April 1961), (US Army Special Warfare School, Fort Bragg, NC) Pike Collection, Unit III, Box 18, Folder 2, Vietnam Center, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas.
20. Conversation with Alfred Paddock, Colonel (Ret.), US Army. Colonel Paddock heard a paper I presented on the 1964 Montagnard uprising at the Society of Military History 2000 Annual Conference at Quantico, Virginia. Paddock commanded an ODA during this period.
21. ''Mission Training,'' Training Memorandum Number June 5 1962, 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Fort Bragg, NC, ''Center for Military History – Medical History Detachment, ''Historical Files on Special Forces Medical Activities in the Vietnam War,'' Record Group 319, Records of the Army Staff, NARA, College Park, MD Box 40, 1–4.

22. "Special Forces Qualification Course," "Center for Military History – Medical History Detachment 'Historical Files on Special Forces Medical Activities in the Vietnam War," Record Group 319, Records of the Army Staff, NARA, College Park, MD, Box 7, 101–210.
23. "Program of Instruction for Course 33-G-G3, Special Forces Officer," February 14 1962, US Army Special Warfare School, Fort Bragg, NC, Pike Collection, Unit III, Box 18, Folder 3, Vietnam Center, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, 1.
24. "Program of Instruction for Course 33-G-F6, Counterinsurgency Operations," February 14 1962, US Army Special Warfare School, Fort Bragg, NC, Pike Collection, Unit III, Box 18, Folder 3, Vietnam Center, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, 3, 5, 11–12.
25. "Training Memorandum Number 2: Awarding Prefix and Suffix '3' [Special Forces Qualification], " Headquarters, 77th Special Forces Group (Airborne), January 26 1960, Center for Military History – Medical History Detachment, "Historical Files on Special Forces Medical Activities in the Vietnam War," Record Group 319, Records of the Army Staff, NARA, College Park, MD, Box 20, 1.
26. Simpson, *Inside the Green Berets*, 22.
27. *Lessons of the War in Indochina*, vol. 2, trans. by V. J. Croizat, Colonel, USMC (Ret.), Rand Memorandum RM-5271-PR (May 1967), Record Group 472, NARA, College Park, MD, Box 19.
28. *Lessons of the War in Indochina*, 156.
29. *Lessons of the War in Indochina*, 157.
30. John D. Howard, Major, USA, "GCMA/GMF: A French Experience in Indochina," *Military Review*, vol. 56, no. 4 (April 1976), 77.
31. Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: a French View of Counterinsurgency* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), xiii. This first appeared in 1961. Colonel Trinquier was the first commander of the unit as well, with an extensive background in Indochina and as a paratrooper.
32. Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 268.
33. Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 275–276.
34. "The Problem of Ethnic Minorities in Viet-Nam," 5, JFKL, NARA, Papers of Bernard Fall, Box T-2.
35. The following came from the JFKL, NARA, Papers of Bernard B. Fall: George A. Kelly, "Revolutionary War and Psychological Action," *Military Review*, vol. 40, no. 7 (Oct. 1960), 3–13 (Box J-54); Robert B. Rigg, COL, US Army, "Twilight War," *Military Review*, vol. 40, no. 8 (Nov. 1960), 28–32 (Box J-55); Slavko N. Bjelajac, "Psywar: the Lessons from Algeria," *Military Review*, vol. 42, no. 12 (Dec. 1962), 2–7 (Box J-55).
36. Bernard B. Fall, "Portrait of *The Centurions*," 6, JFKL, NARA, Papers of Bernard B. Fall, Box T-2.
37. Peter Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria: the Analysis of a Political and Military Doctrine* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 8.
38. Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare*, 17.
39. Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare*, 23–25.
40. Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare*, Chapters 4 and 5.
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4 Counterinsurgency in Vietnam: competing discourses

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5 Choosing the wrong trails

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2. "Annex B to 5th Special Forces Group," 9.
3. "Vietnam Hilsman Trip Report, 12/62–1/63," Hilsman Papers, "Countries Philippines–Vietnam," Box 3, JFKL, NARA, 1 and 6.
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5. David M. Tocek, *The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam: They Did Everything but Learn from It* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001).
6. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power*, 204.
7. "Capsule Assessment of the Effort in South Vietnam," December 19 1962, Memorandum from the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hilsman) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Harriman), *FRUS*, vol. 2, 792.
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11. "Bi-Monthly Operational Summary for period 5–18 January 63," January 21 1963 (II CTZ) and "Monthly Operational Summary for Period 20 Oct–20 Nov 63," December 9 1963 (II CTZ), USASOC Archives, Vietnam Collection.
12. "Annex B to 5th Special Forces Group," 9–10.
13. Colby, *Lost Victory*, 164.
14. Frank M. Lebar, Gerald C. Hickey, and John K. Musgrave, eds., *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, Connecticut: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1964), 94–5, 135.
15. "Bi-Monthly Operational Summary for period 5–18 Jan 63," US Army Special Forces (Provisional) Vietnam, January 21 1963, USASOC Archives, Vietnam Collection, 4. Operational Summaries did not include complete names. Detailed orders for each ODA – including complete names and service numbers – accompanied each detachment for their temporary tours of duty to support these missions. The military records for these men remained at their home duty stations on Okinawa or in the United States.
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17. "Annex C (Company C Unit History) to Outline History of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces participation in the CIDG Program 1961–1970," Record Group 319, Records of the Army Staff, NARA, College Park, MD, 3.
18. "Bi-Monthly Operational Summary for period 5–18 Jan 63," US Army Special Forces (Provisional) Vietnam, January 21 1963, USASOC Archives, Vietnam Collection, 4–9.
19. "Bi-Monthly Operational Summary for period 5–18 Jan 63," US Army Special Forces (Provisional) Vietnam, January 21 1963, USASOC Archives, Vietnam Collection, 10–12.
20. "Outline Plan, CIDG, III Corps, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) 'S3 Command Reports' 26 February 1963," Record Group 472, NARA College Park, MD, Box 2, 1–3.

21. "Bi-Monthly Operational Summary for period 5–18 Jan 63," US Army Special Forces (Provisional) Vietnam, January 21 1963, USASOC Archives, Vietnam Collection, 13–14.
22. "Standard Operating Procedures for Initiating and Supporting Economic and Social Development Program in CIDG and Related Areas," March 29 1963, USASOC Archives, Vietnam Project, Box 15, 1.
23. "Support of CIDG Program," Headquarters US Army Special Forces (Provisional), Vietnam, 27 May 1963, USASOC Archives, "USSF Policy and Doctrine", 1.
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31. "Civilian Irregular Defense Group Project Outline," Headquarters, US Army Special Forces (Provisional), Vietnam, August 17 1963, "1963 SF-VN CIDG Project Outline," USASOC Archives, Vietnam Collection.
32. "Debriefing of Colonel George C. Morton," 39.
33. "MACV Directive for Assumption of Operational Control of Border Surveillance Program, J-3 8409," found in "Debriefing of Colonel George C. Morton," 46–7.
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38. "Annex B to 5th Special Forces Group," 10.
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41. "Debriefing of Colonel George C. Morton," 38.
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43. "Debriefing of Colonel George C. Morton," 39; Kelly, *US Army Special Forces*, Chapter 3.
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